By the end of the night

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by EarthsickWithoutYou

Summary

Will accidentally drops an envelope from his bag one day at the FBI when Hannibal is visiting. Inside is an invite to Will's 15 year high school reunion, the very last place in the world he'd be caught going on purpose. UNTIL Dr. Lecter ever-so-generously offers to go with him and pose as his boyfriend...

Notes

Thanks to Alisha for the fabulous prompt. 🥰✨🌹

See the end of the work for more notes

How to make two lovers of friends

Will had been trying to type up a report on the latest case for at least an hour, producing a grand total of one paragraph. It wasn't even a *good* paragraph. He stared blankly at the unconvincing statements, his attempt to honestly convey the facts without implicating himself for his identification and confused idolization of the killer.

This wasn't going to work.

When it came to the Chesapeake Ripper, Will's judgment was clearly impaired, and he thoroughly intended to shake this twisted admiration somehow, as soon as possible. In the meantime, he was going to have to become a much better liar. He plunked his finger down on the "delete" key, taking out the whole paragraph line by pathetic line. If only it was that easy to erase all his frightening secret desires and proclivities. And delete his guilt complex, while he was at it.

A knock at the door of his office in the Academics building at Quantico roused Will from his near-stupor of self-blaming chaos. He groaned under his breath, muttering, "what now?"

But to his relief, it was not a fellow agent there to give him more work, yell at him or condescendingly "make sure he was doing okay, that last Ripper crime scene was a doozy." It wasn't even one of his annoyingly plucky or irritatingly whiny and entitled students coming to praise or complain about his class. No, it was his therapist, Dr. Hannibal Lecter.

Will always called him by full name when suddenly encountering the man. It would not do to slip up and just moan "hi, Hannibal," flinging himself into the doctor's big, strong arms, and he was about 80% sure that might actually happen if he got too casual in his mind.

Keeping the professional and therapist-patient boundaries respectfully intact, while avoiding his own total humiliation and highly likely rejection, Will opened with a more expected response.

"Did Jack send you to check on me, Dr. Lecter?" He raised his eyebrows with a sardonic half-smile which Hannibal was more than up to taking on.

It was something he loved about Dr. Lecter, the way the man never turned away from Will or rescinded his desire to be friends, no matter how awkward or grumpy, even damaged and possibly scary, Will seemed at any given moment. He'd never met anyone quite like–

"Hannibal," his therapist greeted him smoothly, "Please, Will, I think we know each other well enough and have become close enough friends for a first name basis, don't you?"

You really don't want me to answer that question. "If you say so," he managed, then added with a flourish of his hand, "Please, come into my lavish accommodations, make yourself at home."

“I don’t mind if I do.” Hannibal walked in, holding a to-go carrier with two cups from Starbucks in it.

He did not turn pale or cringe at the sight of Will’s ugly professor’s office with its tan walls, scuffed old desk and lack of decorations. Instead, he merely held one of the cups out to Will and said with a gentle smile, “I remembered that you favor the double-shot macchiato.”

Will blushed, taking the cup as Hannibal sat down in the scruffy chair with one worn wooden leg that tended to wobble as much as Will’s common sense lately. Luckily, the chair stayed in one piece, and for now, so did Will.

He knew he was a ticking time bomb, between his violent temptations, dangerous admirations for the wrong people, and this nearly unmanageable attraction to his own damn therapist. It was more a question of when and what, specifically, would make him explode into a full-on nightmare that wrecked everything in his path before most likely self-destructing, not if.

An inappropriate and embarrassing crush was an extra problem Will didn’t need, but there he was.

“Yeah, if I could pump the caffeine into my bloodstream with an all-day IV line, I would.” Will lifted the lid off his coffee, sitting there at his desk feeling a little bit dopey, somehow floaty, as he often did around Hannibal. “This is very kind, thank you.”

He blew on the foamy drink and took a sip with an appreciative nod-and-smile. Hannibal looked like he could not possibly belong in this place; his impeccable, yet daring three piece suit, silvery-gray and bright red plaid, plus a silk tie with a floral pattern, was a burst of colorful eccentricity, sure. But it was also a splash of undeniable style, class and grace.

Will thought almost mournfully of his own attire, consisting of a shirt with plaid to match the bland color of the walls, unhelped by a wan gray shade that completed the pattern’s duet. The effect couldn’t be much improved by his tie, which was navy with thin white stripes on it. Will never noticed until this inconvenient moment that the design resembled the absurd “laser” background in elementary school photos.

Yes, they had both mixed and matched colors and patterns, but Hannibal looked like a sartorial god, pristine yet mysteriously intense, worst of all untouchable. The ache of it roved over Will’s skin like a cool, phantom breath. He couldn’t seem to get warm lately, shut out in the winter of being alone in this attraction. Afraid to call it love, he never did.

Taming his thoughts seemed to come easy, but dealing with the deeper call of primal urges was a whole other matter. Nothing he’d directly discussed with Hannibal yet. If and when he did confess the full, terrifying depth of his murderous inclinations, would Hannibal finally be disgusted by him?

Would he care that Will held the urges back with all his might, or hold him responsible just for thinking some of the wild, brutally morbid things he did? Awful, beautiful things to do to bad people. He could taste their blood in his dreams, feel the drag of a sharp blade down

tender flesh, opening like a zipper under his command and his glistening, midnight-dark gaze. Blood, reflected in his eyes, a more accurate mirror than his human semblance.

Would a confession like that push Hannibal away or bond them even more closely through the trust which would be established? That level of acceptance eluded Will; he'd never been brave enough to discuss this subject with anyone, and even the tiny glimpses of his evil inner self that sometimes splashed over the facade of his normalcy were enough to make other people shrink back from his presence, avoid his company.

"Penny for your thoughts?" Hannibal asked, and Will realized he'd been silent too long.

"Sorry, I guess I really needed the coffee." He forced a clumsy laugh and fiddled with his glasses, adjusting them at least two more times than was needed. "It's been the sort of day that fogs my mind. Too many details to distill into a report, too many…worrisome memories of what I have seen and felt lately, of the Ripper's mind, his…design. Ahem, it, it's a lot to explain, without seeming…"

"To understand the Ripper a little too well?" Hannibal inquired, sipping his own coffee. "That must be a thin line to tread."

He had placed the to-go container neatly in the small recycle bin by the door and laid his fancy wool coat over the chair beside him. And he sat with his legs neatly crossed, elegant, yet caring and concerned.

"Right, to say the least…" Will shrugged. "If I let on just how deep into a killer's mind I can really get, my understanding might seem suspicious or unstable, at least. But, if I obscure too many insights, I would just seem to suck at my highly specialized job."

"You work too hard to have to pretend that you're less than you are."

"Well, um…most people would probably prefer the less-of-me version. The higher you turn up the volume on my personality, my mentality, it gets…unsavory?"

"I am not most people. Feel free to offer me the blaring, bitter extremes of yourself, Will, I won't leave the table, as it were."

"You are definitely not most people." Will shook his head, trailing a finger absently over the lid of his coffee. He floundered around for replies and could only land on a disappointing, "So, uh, what brings you by?"

"No special reason," Hannibal admitted. "You did not come to your session last week, and the next appointment isn't until tomorrow evening. I found myself…unwilling to wait so long before seeing you again, seeing how you are faring."

"Oh." The corners of Will's mouth twitched; he was in distinct danger of grinning. The metaphorical butterflies swirling in his stomach felt damn real, and sweat was lightly prickling his sensitive skin. He forced himself not to take Hannibal's words too seriously.

He wasn't anxious to see you, for its own sake. He's checking in on me, is all. It's his job to contain the Will Graham Problem. I'm not a potential lover, I'm a clean-up job. He feels responsible for…monitoring my instability. To whatever extent he intuits it.

That did not explain the sweet warmth in Hannibal's dark amber gaze. Will felt the look as a wave washing over him, threatening to sweep him away and erode his self-control.

He knew all about the reactions of his mind and body, that it was only scientific, nothing special. Hannibal made him feel remarkably cared about, showed him platonic affection that Will wanted to believe was more than that.

Every small act of admiring solicitude, every compliment and word of encouragement caused dopamine and norepinephrine to flood Will's senses. The latter was the real problem; dopamine, while almost a stranger to Will most of the time, made him suffer a panic of delight, but the fight or flight instincts that made attraction unbearably exciting threatened his control.

It didn't take a brain scan to know that his gorgeous, sophisticated therapist was driving him into a frenzy of foolish desire. He knew damn well that Hannibal's attention blew the dust off the reward centers of his mind and hit his ventral tegmental area, plus the caudate nucleus, like a defibrillator. Coming back to life wasn't always a good thing, not when lingering in the fog of purgatory-on-Earth was so much safer for all concerned.

"I'm okay," he said, feeling indescribably flustered. He wanted to continue the conversation and abruptly end it at the same time; option A was enticing and thrilling; option B meant his heart might slow down and he might be able to form cogent thoughts again.

Hannibal was unconvinced. "I'm not sure it's 'okay' to feel this resigned to your exhausting task of dumbing yourself down so that the good people of the FBI can more easily digest your presence and contributions."

"Oh, right." Will rubbed his jaw and let out a quietly harsh laugh at his own expense. "What you really mean is, do I blame and guilt myself so much that I think I deserve to put myself through that exhaustion? To have to dial myself back all the time? Am I punishing myself?"

"What would you say, if that was my true meaning?" Hannibal asked, leaning forward slightly.

"I'd say we're not in session, Doctor." Will stood up.

He did not know what to do with his body, so he'd better indicate that Hannibal should leave. Then, Will could have a lovely afternoon full of silently screaming at his own bashful nervousness, until he could go home and bellow a few angry, miserable yells into a pillow.

Will didn't want to scare the dogs, after all. Alana once said dogs keep a promise that a person can't, but Will had to muffle his dark intensity around them, too. There really wasn't much of a difference in the draining routine.

But having a true, human friend like Hannibal *was* entirely different. As soon as Will let himself feel how he *felt* about Hannibal, he was weakened and exhilarated, too ballsy in his (attempted) flirtations one second and hiding again the next. Hannibal meant so much that Will had to walk him out of the office now, get out of this quagmire of a conversation, at all costs.

Hannibal stood as well, but when Will moved towards the door, he set a gentle hand on Will's forearm to stop him. The hand lingered with a fleeting squeeze.

"I remember you saying that you're more comfortable the less personal we are," the older man murmured thoughtfully.

His momentary slip into slightly jumbled wording was an unusual fluctuation in his flawless English mastery and intellectual speaking.

But Will could take each of these meaningful minutia, the coffee, the hand on his arm, "more comfortable the less personal" and all, and refuse to believe they were signs of reciprocation.

Feeling the heat of Hannibal's gaze on his besotted, bewildered face made Will's heart skip a beat. He summoned the nerve to return the look, and could have cried at how much he wanted this man he was never going to have. The happy ending a monster like Will didn't deserve. That was why he would not increase his own future misery by embracing immature, flimsy, so-called evidence of Hannibal's feelings for him.

People in love are crazy, which makes me double-crazy.

"I didn't even know you then," Will chuckled shakily. It was true; he now couldn't imagine not wanting to be much more personal with Hannibal than was considered even broadly appropriate.

"If our dynamic has progressed to the point of intimacy where full honesty has nothing to do, necessarily, with therapeutic care, and everything to do with caring for you, would you still feel you must shut down like that?"

"I have no idea. It's never really come up before." Will gulped.

"I believe you, but at the same time I've always found that incredibly hard to believe."

Hannibal wasn't touching him anymore, but Will felt him anyway, as if the older man's long, powerful fingers had left a mark and still burned right through his skin, down to the bone. To expose him or set him free? Save him or see enough to warn everyone else he was unfit for… well…*anything?*

"Why?" Will asked, his stomach in knots, until it unfurled just to launch into somersaults that left him dizzy and almost literally lovesick.

"Isn't it obvious?" Hannibal lifted his light brows with a smile of amused, fond exasperation, and Will toyed with the strap of his work bag like a teenager in a Disney sitcom.

He had even been batting his damn eyelashes, only noticing a few seconds after the Bambi-ish technique was subconsciously employed by his traitorous, gullible heart.

Will finally tugged on the strap enough, also without even realizing it, that the cheap fabric gave out with a sad "snap" before sending his bag to the floor in a heap of worn-out faux leather and tweed.

In silent consternation at his own inability to stop being a disaster for even five minutes, Will dropped to the floor and began scooping up the spilled contents, including his wallet and a few folders' worth of student papers.

Hannibal crouched beside him, smiling as he retrieved a series of wallet-sized photos of Will's dogs, carefully contained in a pale blue fold-out with patterns of paws on it.

"Perhaps it's time for a new bag," he suggested as Will took the photos from him and tried not to faint when their hands brushed.

"That's stopped being optional or up to procrastination." Will turned red at the sight of his deodorant which had fallen out beside the gum and some random mail from home which he'd tossed into the bag that morning without even knowing when he'd get to it.

He was cold and shivering in touch-deprivation, anxiety, pressure and something he hated to, but had to call love-deprivation. *Except* when he saw Hannibal, and heated up until he felt like a cartoon thermometer, the red going *up, up, up* until the glass shattered. A *little* embarrassing, all told.

As he stuffed the deodorant back into the bag and hoped Hannibal did not now see him as some foul-smelling, sweaty freak, Will barely noticed the older man taking the pile of mail with a curious look.

"What have we here?" Hannibal said with a smile that seemed too playful for Will's comfort. He stood, reaching a hand down to help Will up, and displayed an envelope with pine-green embossed writing on it. "Is this from your teenaged alma mater?"

Will flushed at the sight of the return address, which was – *oh, no, why* –

"Deer River High School in Louisiana," Hannibal read aloud with fascinated cheer.

"Aw, Jesus, what do *they* want?" Will asked, mortified as the mere sight of the name on paper had brought his Southern drawl back like he was sixteen again.

Hannibal gave him a cutely mischievous look and weighed the envelope in his hand. "It's a reunion invitation. Will, are you coming up on fifteen years?"

"Jeez, you say that like it's a good thing." Will took the letter and ripped it open unceremoniously. A quick glance at the contents proved that Hannibal had been right.

"It sounds like an exciting opportunity," Hannibal insisted, and Will wondered if Lithuania was not another country but another planet, where everything was the opposite of how it was there on Earth. This seemed the only logical explanation for what he had just said.

“Hannibal…” The first name tasted so sensuous and overly personal, even in passing, even when discussing possibly the worst topic ever. “First of all, even the name of the damn school’s a blatant lie. There are no deer in the area, and it ain’t – for fuck’s – sorry, it *isn’t* a river, it’s a muddy swamp. As for school, well–” he huffed a resentful laugh. “Not much in the way of *education* occurred. I didn’t so much graduate as *survive*, with a certificate of congratulations for enduring the four-year-long buffet of extravagant adolescent torture.”

“Quite a speech. How do you think your classmates remember you?”

Will picked the broken bag up, cradling it in sympathy, as he felt about like it looked. He put the dead faux-briefcase-messenger-bag sort of thing on the desk and sighed, leaning against it. “As a creepy weirdo, Hannibal, what else? I mean, c’mon.”

“If that is truly the case, would you not like to go back and prove them wrong? Show them how much you’ve grown into yourself and found success?”

“Are your eyes working okay?” Will smirked and snapped his fingers near Hannibal’s face, noting with a brief jolt of prideful adoration that Hannibal would find this rude from anyone else. But when Will did it, he laughed good-naturedly.

“Sure, I’d love nothing more than to go back and show off my amazing success to that gaggle of despicable bullies. But since I am *still* a creepy weirdo and have *not* grown into myself, nor have I found success, it would be more like a trip down memory lane than a social vindication. Please be aware that memory lane is strewn with thorny vines and poisonous vipers.”

“Really, in Louisiana?” Hannibal gave Will a smirk of his own, though of a different sort. Rather than cynical and challenging, this smirk was affectionately teasing. The kind of smirk Will didn’t have the nerve to conjure. “No deer, but venomous snakes?” He clucked his tongue. “What bad luck.”

“The venomous snakes were known as cheerleaders, football players and psychotically over-motivated gym teachers.” Will held the invitation up theatrically and prepared to rip it in half.

“Wait,” Hannibal stopped him. “What would it take for you to consider yourself successful, to go to this reunion and enjoy a sense of superiority and triumph? Sight unseen, I can assure you that the snakes have not aged so well as you, and that they are nowhere near as interesting.”

Will wondered if his cheeks were quite as deep a shade of magenta as the heat in his skin indicated they must be. He could hope that they were only a rosy pink, but this was obviously in vain.

“I don’t know, maybe not havin’-- uhh, *having* to drag my considerably bedraggled, potentially unstable, overworked and underpaid, badly dressed, perpetually single ass down to Louisiana just to parade my failure and increased social pariah status in front of the Joel Lees and Tammy Beths expecting anything other than public evisceration.”

“Joely?” Hannibal repeated.

Will signaled with his hands as if he was a chef presenting a linguistic delicacy. “Ah, no. Joel. Lee. Tucker. He was my number one bully.”

A lethal-looking iciness entered and fled just as quickly from Hannibal’s face. “I see. Well, then. How would you feel about arriving at the reunion in a designer suit, with a new haircut and shoes, essentially looking like a film star, and with a good-looking, impressive significant other on your arm? I think that would provide a satisfying re-entry onto the scene.”

“I got – *have* no need to re-enter that scene. I’d rather re-enter the Shrike’s Nest.” Will crossed his arms over his slamming heartbeat, wishing it would calm down.

Hannibal had been in here chatting with him for at least twenty minutes, why did it still feel as if he’d been shot up with love cocaine?

The therapist shot Will an arch look. “That’s evident.”

Will cut his finger on the side of the envelope as he stroked it in startled, uncoordinated need to do anything with his hands to detract from his imploding emotions. He barely registered the quick flash of pain, aside from a much-needed stabilization.

“Normal, healthy-minded people with functional lives enjoy going to these events,” he said flatly. “I get it. You’re right. I shouldn’t be so quick to react with…toxic negativity.”

“The only toxic entity I’ve heard you describe is the bullies of your past.” Hannibal approached him with the softest expression Will had ever seen on his chiseled features.

He smelled of Blu de Chanel, clean but woodsy and sweet, and of utter *perfection*. His proximity was warming and made Will feel suddenly more drunk than high. And his large, beautiful hand came up to briefly cup Will’s cheek.

Will swallowed hard as Hannibal caressed his hot, overwhelmed face. “And what is a functional life? I just want you to be happy.”

“I appreciate that.” Will couldn’t form any other words without bursting into tears for so many reasons.

“Perhaps exorcizing a few ghosts of the past would increase your present confidence,” Hannibal theorized with typical confidence of his own.

He had stepped back again, leaving Will’s personal space a whole lot *achier* – which Will had not thought possible mere moments before it happened.

“Sure, but I can’t afford even a thrift store version of the outfit you’re describing. I’ve also yet to find a barber who can do anything with my curls that resembles suave, and I don’t have an impressive significant other. I don’t even have an unimpressive one, just an unimpressive life.”

“I would disagree,” Hannibal replied. “And I would be happy to offer myself as your date. We can play the role of devoted lovers in front of your former classmates. As for your attire, I am equally happy to take you clothes shopping and for a haircut at my favorite salon.”

Will's head throbbed as sweat actually trickled down his brow; his glasses slipped down his nose, and his tie suddenly seemed to be choking him.

"You're kidding."

"I'm not." Hannibal watched Will set his glasses back in the right place on his nose, then approached him more closely again. He casually lifted Will's hand, demonstrating that there was a small amount of blood bubbling from the forgotten paper cut.

Just as smoothly, he took his pocket square from his perfect suit jacket and wrapped it around Will's comparatively grubby, silly finger. "Kidding. Nor am I trying to overextend myself to make you feel better. I genuinely think this would be a fun and helpful experience for you, one which would relieve your stress and infuse you with more confidence in yourself, the sort you deserve. Furthermore, I would greatly enjoy the chance to throw myself into a new project. I've been lamentably bored of late, aside from certain friends and patients, and friends who are patients…"

Will wanted to laugh hysterically, cry for three days, run screaming around the block, and jump on him. "*Haha*…uhhh…."

He stared at the silken, bold red cloth now hugging his finger and then over at Hannibal's calm, encouraging smile.

"I could also use a chance to get out of the city, breathe some fresh air."

"*Swamp* air?" Will asked doubtfully. "Thick, unrelentingly humid swamp air?"

"How fascinatingly Southern Gothic. I am already intrigued by the setting. Can you take the rest of the day off?"

Will could have soaked a box full of sponges with the sweat he felt sure must be pouring off him by now. In the fully air conditioned government building, no less. Hannibal was a bonfire, and if Will let the flames enclose him, he wasn't sure he'd be able to help being the most wildly foolish man in love the world had ever seen.

"I already have it off," he admitted, "I just stayed behind to work on the report, figured I ought to get it done…"

"It can wait." Hannibal spoke breezily, now guiding Will with him out of the office, a hand briefly resting on the small of his friend's back.

Jesus. He can probably feel the sweat, my shirt is sticking to me like glue. Dammit…

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And Hannibal was indeed quite aware, both in a tactile manner and in terms of his unusually attuned olfactory perception, that Will Graham tended to perspire in his presence. Today, Will was doing so more than ever. The scent of anxious fear and arousal was enough to make Hannibal want to rip his clothes off and do *beastly* things to him, no matter where they happened to be.

Although Will was perfectly healthy (the ideal specimen of man, in fact), the profiler's body heat rose even as Will's senses seemed to reel in conflicted, baffled emotion. Meanwhile, Will's clearly long-neglected libido kicked into high gear almost every time they interacted. This occurred more intensely each time Hannibal showed him attention. Showing Will attention was never any trouble, of course, considering that it had quickly become Hannibal's new addiction.

It was incredibly flattering, gratifying, and Will truly smelled divine. His natural scent was earthy, yet sweet as fresh herbs, overlaid with a hint of Wolf Trap pine, and his wide blue eyes were stunning.

Hannibal wanted to make Will tremble and sweat even more, and at present, whilst walking the younger man to his Bentley and making casual conversation about the new plans, he dreamed of yanking Will's ugly little shirt up to expose the smooth canvas of his exquisite skin. And to drag his tongue insistently up the trickling line of perspiration, right there, right then. He wanted it, and Will, *badly.*

He was not a man accustomed to giving up on what he wanted. And while it had been difficult to make his intentions of romantic courtship – and of course, seduction – clear to Will, given the agent's constant insecurity and nervousness, Hannibal believed he had hit on the perfect solution.

Obviously, anyone else might have guessed, by the way Hannibal reacted with peevish jealousy to Will's kiss with Alana Bloom, or panicked when Will fell asleep after a long day at work and missed his therapy session.

Perhaps another indication would have been Hannibal's nearly excessive interest in him, the easily flowing compliments and excuses made to touch Will and scent him anytime he could. If not, the conjuring of yet more excuses to "drop by" and visit Will at home or work nearly every day or night might have signaled an almost obsessive infatuation to anyone with more dating experience or self esteem.

But Will was the rarest, delectable, juicy fruit, deadly to all others, designed only for Hannibal to pluck and ravish, savor and devour. The boy must be approached with delicacy and careful planning, or he would run away before Hannibal could make him believe what to Will seemed impossible: that his wealthy, brilliant, highly respected, greatly desired therapist and good friend was hopelessly in love and lust with him.

After the weekend, Hannibal felt sure this would change. He would be able to draw Will in slowly, with the pretense of "faking" a romantic relationship and uninterrupted close quarters, so much extra time together to lay his various traps and capture Will.

Even the delight of *finally*, after months of wishing to do so, taking the gorgeous creature on an indulgent shopping spree to spoil him as he should be spoiled, was nearly more than Hannibal could handle without losing his cool demeanor.

Hannibal's own previous idea of a "functional life" included a debonair and thoroughly convincing person suit, but Will Graham had gotten underneath it so quickly that emotional nakedness had soon been inevitable. The exhilarating chance to be truly Seen and still

adored, and to have the luscious boy as his very own for life and long thereafter were nearly all Hannibal could think of these days.

It was equally a relief and an exciting sprig of zest to his mood, having this exceptional chance with Will, and Hannibal did not intend to waste a moment of it.

He pondered the possibilities and choices that lay ahead as he drove into downtown and towards the finest boutiques and salons in Baltimore. Will sat in the passenger seat looking like a renaissance angel and fretting that he was a bother to Hannibal.

The mere thought was a heady awareness making Hannibal want to undo his own trousers and shove Will's head down to his cock while he was still driving in public. That *mouth*, that perfect, cherubic, soft, warm mouth! Those pretty, rose-petal lips, wrapped around his pulsing, hot and hard manhood– Hannibal reeled himself in again, having to do that these days as often as Will but for different reasons.

In order to keep his mind on the matter at hand rather than allowing his burgeoning arousal to continue rushing south, he reminded himself of a few basic rules he should follow during the homecoming trip. Obviously, aside from his plan of a slick and suave, tentative, patient but conniving and inescapable seduction, so that he could possess Will forevermore, he knew he could not kill while they were in Will's hometown.

A small Louisiana town was no Baltimore; murders were rare occurrences, and the Ripper's exploits would be far more blatantly appalling. The shock of it would not only terrify the citizens, but would ruin the time with Will as the sweet boy would feel obligated to turn his attention to catching his supposed nemesis. Hannibal must restrain his murderous instincts, therefore, at all costs.

While Hannibal believed that this was a simple enough expectation, the fact was that he had never been to a high school reunion (a rare omission in his otherwise eclectic and sparkling social career) and therefore did not realize that there was no setting more conducive to homicidal urges.

Graduation (Friends Forever)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

By the end of the night
I wanna feel like the sky is dripping on every part of me
And by the end of the night
I wanna look at the lights
Chasing the shape of you next to me
And by the end of the night
I wanna be the only one in the world
When I look in your eyes -Ellie Goulding

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"I don't like *nostalgia,* especially of this era, my…last throes, in a way." Will watched the road go by as Hannibal drove them through rustic Louisiana in a rented car. "It makes me *feel* things in my memories. I...empathize with teen-me too much."

With a sigh, he recalled the tumultuous emotional terrain of his two years living in Deer River. Junior and Senior year of high school, and *oh,* it was more than enough time to spend in that town. It was far too long. Typical of Dad to choose this awful place to set down roots longer than any other.

This road was awfully close to the one-horse town with its small population and high density of asshole behavior. Too close. But to be here with Hannibal, it was almost worth it all, even as the imposing reunion itself – as a real event and not just a concept – kept getting nearer.

Out here, the air was still light with the scent of fresh flowers. The rolling green hills of local farms were peaceful and sweet-looking, complete with horses in the fields and stands selling fruits and vegetables closer to the long, winding road.

This was…Lavender Hills, Will noted by glancing at the next "Welcome to" sign. A temporary respite.

"And how do you feel about your high school memories?" Hannibal had on Prada sunglasses with dark blue lenses in an aviator style, and he looked so fucking cool.

With a tan, short-sleeved shirt showing off his toned, golden arms, plus a pair of khakis that were just too damn fitted for Will's, *ahem*, comfort, he confirmed the profiler's theory that he had an outfit for absolutely every situation and they were all perfect.

"I don't know." Will threw his hands up, trying to understand his own inner workings.

He was often the only person he struggled to get to know, which kind of indicated he lacked empathy for his *present* self, but had it in excess to offer to pretty much everyone else.

“It’s…as if they are still…immediate or possible. There are some feelings I don’t think I should be able to remember.”

“Such as?” Hannibal quirked a brow, by no means immune to worry. He did not at all care for Will describing his suffering as much as his former self would have anticipated.

Will in pain was beautiful, but Will trapped by self-doubt and self-hatred was a terrible thing to watch. It made his hands shift anxiously on the steering wheel, a micro-tell of his affections which went unnoticed.

Steadily glaring at the bright blue sky and endless-seeming trees, Will added, “*Hope*. That specific feeling of excitement, like…before a school dance. The whole world and your whole life ahead of you. Anything could happen, so much of it wonderful. You pick out some… outfit you think is really cool and makes you look great, and you think ‘maybe tonight is the night.’ By the end of *this* night, I’ll fall in love and be loved in return by that very same person. Like some juvenile, inane concept of magic, which is such total nonsense, it irritates me how easily I recall its exhilarating anticipation.”

“A textbook example of a man who has been let down so many times, he fears hope itself. What would you do with hope, with happiness? You can’t even get there, because you stop yourself short when the opportunity for excitement intrudes your bitter, gray-shaded existence.”

Will let out a noise like a snapping gasp and his eyes followed its reproving, outraged meaning. Blue fire blazed straight over to the man in the driver’s seat, who remained annoyingly calm, vivisecting Will's deepest fears and weaknesses.

“You’re not gonna do this all weekend, are you?” Will groaned, exasperated and offended, but most of all shocked by this crystal clear understanding the doctor had of him. “Treat our conversations like a session. Take me apart, piece by piece and examine each *pathetic* working part under your psychiatric blacklight? I warn you, the amount of contamination is severe, and not at all pretty.”

“Heavens, no. We’re here for an adventure, to have fun, and I hope, regain *your* ability to hope.” Hannibal smiled and put his sunglasses on top of his head, so that they pushed back his soft-looking hair.

His coffee brown eyes were not quite apologetic. Will knew he meant every word he’d said, as Hannibal wasn’t one to skirt around the truth. At least, not when it came to his thoughts on Will’s…issues.

Before Hannibal, no one had ever told him things like “you’re my friend, I don’t care about the lives you save, I care about your life.” No one tried to pull him back when he ran into the abyss of monsters he called a job. But *Hannibal* got worried about him. Hannibal wanted to save him, and goddammit, there were times Will wanted to be saved.

It was an embarrassing, childish, fairy tale sort of feeling, but apparently he couldn’t kill it with his own insecurities. It was too strong. Will cared about Hannibal too much to let go of

that little sliver of a waking dream…the two of them as a couple. Some days it was all he had to hold him together.

Hannibal wasn't so much of an open book when it came to talking about his own life and feelings, but Will hoped (there it was again!) they'd get there.

So no, Hannibal was not apologetic, but regretful for his bluntness. "I will try to restrain myself when my therapeutic tendencies invade. As well as the natural inclination to correct my friend when he calls himself 'pathetic.' Nothing could possibly be further from the truth."

Besides, dear boy, I plan to take you apart in quite a different way than you imagine…but I *can imagine it, so vividly.*

"Hope *floats,*" Will said flatly, dragging his hand along the bottom of the window, leaving a small, streaking line of his fingerprint.

Acting like a sulky kid, how was that becoming his go-to around Hannibal, when all he wanted was to show the man his best side? It had to be letting his guard down enough to actually feel something. His other feelings, the bad ones in all their shapes and colors of ruination, had come spilling out alongside his very few good ones. Some people called it vulnerability; Will just called it one more problem he didn't need.

"Pardon me?" Hannibal inquired. He didn't get the *Hope Floats* reference.

"It's a stupid movie. One of those….romantic dramas about getting over having your life ruined, rebuilding and all that. Dunno why I thought of it. Word association, I guess. Bad habit."

"I like it. Talking with you provides me with a never-ending, unpredictably eclectic buffet of discovery. I enjoy these small glimpses of your casual life, flipping channels to watch a romantic movie late at night when you can't sleep, grimly resigned to steal a sense of relief by empathizing with the protagonist. Blaming yourself for the tendency to seek such flimsy and insubstantial comfort. Emotions too big to be covered by the blanket you're using or even the dog on your lap, an hour and a half of simple paths to joy, interrupted by commercials showcasing domesticity, the good life, the American dream."

Will flinched and fidgeted, bothered by how every small muttered barb and sideways, tangential comment he made went noticed by Hannibal. *Afraid* to be listened to that way, like he mattered.

"Why do you know all of that? *Jesus.* Dr. Lecter, are you surveilling me at home?"

"I know because I have the same habit." Hannibal covered Will's hand briefly with his own, giving a squeeze before returning his grip to the steering wheel. "Please don't mistake my sometimes excessive and overreaching desire to know and help you as a friend and intimate, for 'talking as if we are in session.' I'm not analyzing you, I'm…expressing fascination for a man who is unlike any other I know."

“Not so textbook after all, Doctor?” Will’s face was hot, pink darkening on his pale cheeks at the compliments and care.

“None I’ve ever read. I think I want to write a new one devoted to you in all your crystalline and onyx depths of uniqueness. But not on paper or a screen, in my memory palace. Knowing you means more to me than our professional connection or our clinical one could ever indicate.”

“There’s a song like that,” Will said with a hesitating, flinching smile. “‘*If they asked me, I could write a book / about the way you walk and whisper and look*.’” His shame caught up with him as he hurried to add, “Dumb old standard.”

“It’s lovely. Perhaps, then, you understand how I wish my memory palace to house the people, places and experiences that matter most. Many use such a place in the mind as a mnemonic system, but to me it is a very real place. Even a retreat, at times.”

“Sounds nice. And, um, thank you, you’re more kind to me than I know how to…deal with, honestly. I only hope I can be there for you in return. Still learning how friendship works when it’s real and not a premise to what someone wants from me.”

“Some relationships grow and evolve, deepening friendships as they blossom into new forms, but that is not based on any sort of demand or expectation. It’s only natural.”

Will nodded slowly, “Yes.”

Hannibal continued, “Then, perhaps…Will, I feel we’ve become friends, so far above and beyond colleagues and doctor-patient…it would be unprofessional for me, in fact potentially harmful to us both were I to continue being your therapist.”

Will was fine with that, actually. He only would have panicked if Hannibal ended the therapeutic relationship to end *all* association with Will. But this, he was doing to keep Will closer than would be appropriate for a doctor-patient thing. And that was promising.

Will didn’t know what to say, so he said, “You know, traditionally, when a therapist needs to cease therapy for forming too personal a bond with the patient, they part ways, the healthier solution being total separation. Any kind of relationship which followed would be problematically colored by the old power dynamic, never able to fully shed that coil.”

“I do know, and you know I know. How you thrive on swimming around in my words and splashing them back at me. I don’t care about the danger of forming a personal attachment based on how our relationship began. I care too much about keeping this to lose it over some rules which don’t and can’t apply to a bond that is so totally unique and rare.”

“Are you protecting a fragile little teacup, Doctor? Sheltering me before I totter off the shelf and smash?”

“If you are asking me whether I will catch you if you fall, then the answer is yes. My arms will always be outstretched. Fragile can be remarkable and strong. It takes bravery to allow softness to overpower the armor we build to get by in society. Your fragility, haunting and

striking as it is, comes from an emotional honesty I aspire to. It has never been easy for me to open up and look at my deepest, most hidden fears and pains. I keep those doors in my palace securely locked, double-bolted. You let your demons come out to play."

"What if *I* am the demons?"

"Then I'll learn to dance with demons. Considering where we are headed, it seems appropriate, of course."

Will winced. "Ha. *Dancing*, dammit, ugh. Yeah. Guess there will be dancing at the reunion. And hey, I kinda like that about how we talk to each other, when we get to be – uh, when we're alone, just you and me. We can be as pretentious and long-winded as we want, even use so many metaphors and obscure references that no one else could tolerate. But I don't mind it at all. I think it's…compelling and enveloping. Intellectually, I feel that our conversations enrich me. And if there is such a thing as a vibe, I think ours match up surprisingly well, considering all of our differences."

The older man's profile was noble and impressive, chiseled and beautiful under the mid-day, golden-yellow sunlight that flickered over them in thick, fleeting panels as the car traveled smoothly over the main road. Will was grateful to think they could avoid messing up the rental car driving in some of the bumpy, muddy roads in town, as there was no need to go there. The hotel was just outside of Deer River…

"*This* is the place you reserved?" Will asked in surprise as Hannibal pulled into a small, circular driveway. It was *definitely* not the Marriott.

It was an immaculately kept-up and thoroughly adorable old Victorian, not to mention it was rose pink, with a garden of merry tulips, violets and daffodils swaying in the breeze out front.

"It's a bed and breakfast," Hannibal announced, just as cheerful as the bright little flowers. "Lovely, isn't it?"

He shut the engine off and pulled the lever for the trunk, quickly going to the passenger side to open Will's door.

"Uh. Thanks," Will said, unaccustomed to the gentlemanly, caring treatment. When had anyone else ever opened a car door for him?

Nobody, regardless of gender, treated him like Hannibal did. He was terrified of putting too much meaning on it and getting disappointed.

Hannibal nodded with a pleased smile. "You don't mind the accommodations, then?"

"Well, now, the reunion's at the Marriott." Will blushed, "Dammit, I set one foot in this town and start talkin' like I never left."

"I find your accent to be thoroughly charming," Hannibal assured him blithely.

Will decided not to mention how Hannibal's accent made *him* feel.

Hannibal insisted, wordlessly, with a series of deft movements blocking Will from reaching for them, that he would carry all the luggage. This involved a game of zig and zag as Will fumbled around trying to be responsible and help out, while Hannibal smirked playfully, stepping to the side and evading Will's assistance.

As he slung Will's travel bag over his shoulder, with the handle of his own rolling suitcase clasped in his free hand, he joined Will in the kind of hearty laughter that sounded different out here in the wide open quiet. Peaceful, but yes, *promising*, and definitely exciting.

Their eyes met and Hannibal asked, "Are most of the reunion attendees staying at the Marriott?"

"Yeah, pretty much, thought we'd do the same."

"Does knowing everyone else from your high school is staying there make you want to do the same?"

Will chuckled, "Hell, no. It's just that I probably can't even afford to split the cost of this room for the night. *Rooms*, that is. Ahem. To pay for my, *my own room*, that I will sleep in, alone, in my roo–"

"Adjoining rooms," Hannibal said, rescuing him again. "It's already paid in full for two nights. I took care of it days ago, back home."

"But–"

Hannibal laid his hand on Will's shoulder. "Please, let me do this for you. You deserve to stay somewhere which will allow you actual relaxation, and as you certainly know, I have standards about where I lay my head as well."

Will doubted he'd get any sleep until the flight home. How could he, right on the other side of the wall from his dream man? This was insane.

Hannibal affirmed the matter as settled by walking neatly up to the front entrance, easily rolling and toting their luggage.

Will followed, taking in the sight of the sweet, antique house, quiet and ensconced in rural beauty. He knew what the hotel would be like, cold, plain, full of people he dreaded the prospect of seeing, even for an hour at the reunion (about all he expected to be able to stomach).

And he knew which of his former classmates would be up all night till dawn partying too loudly. The ones who peaked in Senior year and went on to depressing lives where they constantly bragged of those old accomplishments. No, thank you, to the noise and bother.

"Thank you," Will said to Hannibal instead, his voice falling into a deeper tone. "I don't know what else to say, I…"

"You don't have to say anything at all. Not until you want to." Hannibal held the door for him, despite carrying all their stuff while Will lingered outside in a few ways.

Inside, it smelled of freesia and sweet pea, and there was gentle folk music wafting from small speakers on the front desk. Everything appeared to be quaint and rustic, while simultaneously crafted and designed to the finest quality. The wallpaper was artfully faded with images of pale greenery twisting this way and that, and Hannibal stood on the gleaming hardwood with a curious, inquiring smile back at Will.

Unable to help himself, Will let out a happy laugh as his face lit up. Hannibal stopped doing anything else at all and smiled as if he was in a trance. And Will went inside, closing the door quietly behind them.

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"Is everything to your liking?" Hannibal asked, coming into Will's room after a soft knock at the door had caused the younger man to croak nervously, "Oh…Uhh…Come in."

Will watched as his friend scrutinized the room, giving a nod of approval as the profiler smiled, "Of course, Hannibal, it's uh, really lovely."

He was tired of hearing himself say "um" and "uh" all the time, so he tried being more confident.

Okay. He tried *pretending* to feel more confident.

"I can't thank you enough; this might be just the getaway I needed after all."

Hannibal was busily about his organizational and planning-ahead tasks, elegant, prim and authoritative as he carefully hung Will's new suit on the front of the old-fashioned bureau next to the big window that let in so much soft sun.

The light made the unbelievably soft ivory bedding glow, and between that, plus the scent of flowers wafting in from outside and the act of sitting on a mattress this nice, Will would already have felt intoxicated. Hannibal's presence made him actually pinch himself, sure he must be dreaming, as that made it feel *too perfect.*

"This," Hannibal observed, turning around with a cocky smirk, "Despite your initial reaction to not only my scheme, but the shopping expedition which followed your acceptance."

Will groaned, grabbed a pillow that felt like a cloud and stuck his face in it, laughing in embarrassment. He recalled how he'd tried to turn right around and leave when Hannibal brought him to the snobbiest, most expensive men's clothing store in the city.

It took his fifty year old therapist actually *pouting* at him through the glass of the door that separated them for Will to roll his eyes, chuckle, and come back in.

He'd let Hannibal – well, Hannibal and the store assistants who all talked like the lofty celebrity stylists on those reality shows he usually flipped past – dress him to the nines. Soon, he was the proud owner of a blue-gray suit by Brooks Brothers with a price tag that made him almost faint.

Hannibal insisted it was not only “fine,” but that “You really must wear it, Will. You look so transcendently handsome and sophisticated that your former classmates will want to scream and claw their very eyes out at the sight of you.”

He spoke under his breath, warmly lingering by Will’s side as they both looked at him in the mirror. Will huffed a quiet laugh, noticing how Hannibal lowered his voice to share jokes too morbid for others to understand or find amusing.

Will was barely conscious of anything but Hannibal’s closeness and all this over-the-top kind treatment, *spoiling* him, really. But he broke through the haze of it all and noticed he did cut a rather sleek figure in the mirror.

The fabric hugged Will’s fit body while showing off his lean musculature and toned curves. He blushed, noticing how the fabric clung to his thighs and ass, at the same time admitting in his mind….he looked really good, and it was exciting to think about wearing this around Hannibal. Who had also picked out the suit and decided Will didn’t need a tie. Or to button the shirt all the way up. This just happened to mean Will would be showing off his neck...

“No tie. Finally trying to save a few bucks?” Will grinned, but Hannibal shook his head, tugging playfully on the white shirt collar above his friend’s pounding heartbeat.

“Not at all, I’d spare no expense on this errand. It looks better without the tie. It flatters your neck, giving just a hint of your chest. You look cool and debonair, as if you wear this sort of thing all the time. You’ll have a certain rakish air of indifference, darkly mischievous and mysterious. You don’t need a tie. Make them sweat, Will. They deserve it.”

“*So*,” Will said, somehow managing to keep talking despite his face turning red as he started to perspire.

Arousal poured over and into him with a helpless cascade of tingling, aching need. He was far too excited by now, but it felt so amazing, he couldn’t stop leaning into it. “You want me to make them sweat, scream, claw their eyes out, anything else?”

“Of course. They should end the evening by dreading a return to their painfully normal, drab existences, eating their unworthy hearts out at the sight of you, so handsome and enigmatic, clearly in an ecstatic relationship with a man the likes of which they’ve certainly never seen. The most important way they should suffer is to make them see what they’re missing. What *I* have.”

Hannibal leaned in close again, and Will swallowed hard, begging his own wobbly legs not to make him stumble off the small, circular raised platform he stood on in front of the three-way mirror.

“You’re so humble, too,” Will smirked. He loved Hannibal’s huge ego. It was also sexy as hell.

“Only on occasion.”

The therapist wrapped an arm around Will's shoulder and stared at their reflection, making Will realize that they were the same height now, and that he wished Hannibal would drag him into a fitting room, yank this beautiful suit right off him and fuck him to within an inch of his life.

"Don't we make a perfect pair?" Hannibal asked smugly.

His tone remained playful, dazzling Will but making him continually question if it was flirtatious or merely the older man enjoying the scheme. Rooting for Will's supposedly imminent triumph over the bullies of his past, as a *friend.*

"Almost," Will answered.

He turned to find warm, amber eyes meeting his own exactly on level, which felt strange. Intense and beguiling. But he sure didn't mind Hannibal looming slightly above him most of the time, either.

He smiled reflexively and added, "I don't think this mop of mess on my head or the scruffy face exactly match the outfit."

"Then you'll be surprised how little we need to do in that area," Hannibal assured him.

He then put both of his big, strong hands on Will's waist, slipping them under the suit jacket so that the warmly clinging, dominating force of his skin burned against Will through the thin white dress shirt. And with an utterly astounding, devilish laugh low in his throat, Hannibal fucking…*hopped him down*, setting him on the floor.

As Will gazed at him, trying and failing to summon words, his heart hammering wildly, Hannibal just smiled again. "Now then, shall we?"

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"The salon was a little easier than the store," Will admitted, slipping his shoes off to lounge on the big, four-poster bed that was certainly larger than he needed. He was *not* complaining. "God, this bed is unbelievable, you have to try – oh, I mean, you'll enjoy yours. I'm sure it's just as nice."

Hannibal grinned, flashing his cute fangs, and flopped down beside Will, toeing his shoes off. His silver-blonde hair had loosened with the sudden movement, and now it fell over his brow, making him look surprisingly boyish.

"It is incredibly comfortable," Hannibal confirmed. "This is just what we both needed. A break from the harsh, colorless and stiff nonsense of the workaday world. Baltimore and its gray, draining efficiency, the FBI and its suffocating blur of work, how they exhaust you. All so far away now."

Will turned on his side to face Hannibal. "I almost wish we didn't have to go back."

Instead of reacting with surprise, worry or disdain to this unintended, outlandish suggestion, Hannibal laughed, "Well, there are the dogs to consider."

“Other than that.” Will nodded, biting the inside of his mouth to control himself, hanging onto the edge of erotic devastation, about to topple over, and land on Hannibal, humping and moaning like crazy.

“I’d pick them up and run away again, back to this place. Make my life all about long, country walks, fishing, boating, eating in amazing restaurants – mind you, it’s a fantasy, so my funds are limitless.”

“Oh, of course. And what else?”

He turned onto his back again. Hannibal’s eyes were still on him, although the distance between them was respectful and platonic. Or, platonic-*looking*, anyway.

Will couldn’t believe how easy it was to feel those gorgeous eyes looking at him, even when he stared up at the daisy print of the canopy above the bed to avoid looking back. He could *melt*, he was going to boil over, he was going to lose his mind for this man. The scent of him, manly, sexy and spicy, the weight of Hannibal on the other side of the bed, firm, sure and stabilizing, suggestive.

“Nothin’ else,” Will drawled, lapsing into his lazy Southern manner of speech as he drifted into the fantasy.

In describing the vision to his friend, he simply omitted the stunning, Lithuanian doctor by his side, walking with him hand-in-hand in the country town. Shopping with Will, spoiling him again for no good reason.

The two of them playing with the dogs, then going out to a romantic dinner before coming back – well, in his fantasy, Will guessed he could call this place their home instead of a B&B. He could see Hannibal kissing him with relentless, hot passion, then pinning him down right before he fucked Will right into the soft, accommodating mattress and made the headboard smack the wall as the wooden feet of the bed thudded with a heavy rhythm.

Damn, Will could even imagine the way the pretty sheets would feel as his nails dug in until they shredded. He could *almost* imagine the harsh, merciless slam of Hannibal *in* him, over him, against him, controlling him. Taking whatever he wanted. Everything Will would give him to the point of his own exhaustion and beyond.

“Just relaxation and getting away from it all,” Hannibal suggested with a relaxed vagueness of his own that never reached his darkening eyes. “Sounds better than a dream.”

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They went their platonic (?) separate ways soon after to take showers one at a time, never, unfortunately, bumping into each other “by mistake” as the towels around their waists fell to the floor.

Well, since Hannibal had reserved the room for two nights in what he now perceived was an excellent, if impulsive and risky, whim, he was happy to think there would be plenty of opportunities. If he did not encounter a wet, glistening and bare Will Graham this afternoon,

perhaps…tonight, or in the morning, or the next day. It was important to Hannibal's confidence that he continued to support it with egotistical assumptions.

Still, things were going in such a promising manner so far that he thought seduction and happily ever after were almost in reach.

The staff of the B&B were friendly and helpful. Hannibal appreciated their mellow attitudes, plus their obviously meticulous care of the place, which made it good enough for Will to rest his precious head on the pillow.

He smiled to himself in the mirror, wiping some steam away to better appraise his face, flushed with the heat of his shower and a feeling of powerful anticipation. Will had confided in Hannibal, back at the salon in Baltimore, that he considered his own curly hair nothing more than "a ragamuffin disaster nest." Hannibal could barely believe Will was serious, but the sincerity in his friend's beautiful eyes was undeniable.

He had thus far opted not to wax poetic about Will's nymph-like, gorgeous curls directly to his beloved. This was a delicate situation, and he was in danger of spiraling out of control if he began truly and frankly describing Will to Will.

Instead, he told the hairdresser to neaten up the boy's hair, but not to make the curls too short. And that Will needed a beard trim, but the light presence of facial hair was quite becoming on him and showed off his jawline.

"You're always right, Dr. Lecter," Andreas, the hairstylist, beamed. "I've never even seen such perfect natural curls. They're absolute ringlets, you know. Exceedingly rare. We have to leave them as intact as possible, framing his pretty face. And a little five o'clock shadow can be very beguiling."

"It provides a certain sensuous, devil-may-care mystique, wouldn't you say?" Hannibal asked.

Will had been looking back and forth between them, his eyes wild with a near panic of disbelief, speechless at the compliments he'd never received before. Then Andreas, a svelte, tall man with iron-gray hair, tsked at Will to keep his face still and look ahead.

"Stubble might make some men look like a vagrant or just like they cannot make a simple decision between having or not having a beard," Andreas elaborated. "But with a face like this? It's completely different."

It was lucky for Andreas that he spoke merely in a friendly, aesthetic appreciation and encouragement to a young man who was obviously insecure about his looks. Because with words so accurate and particular, Hannibal might have slit his throat with a straight razor later, if the tone had dipped into an overly admiring one.

Back in the here and now, standing nude before the steamy mirror, Hannibal was pleased with what he saw. He knew he kept his figure pristine and that the raw, earthy sexual prowess he kept routinely buttoned up in his three piece suits was just like this place: exactly what

Will needed. The thought of it was quite enough to make Hannibal hard, so quickly he felt dizzy.

But he didn't bother to touch himself, preferring to save it all up for Will.

Hannibal was not above repressing himself even to painful extents, since when he finally *did* explode, Will would feel the full power of his lustful obsession. And the wicked, delightful, self-deluding, brilliant, beautiful brat Hannibal loved would never again question whether he was wanted and adored.

***

When they arrived at the hotel in which the reunion's main event was occurring, Hannibal was unsurprised by the depressingly generic look of the exterior. But he'd never been so delighted to walk into a subpar eyesore of a hotel, had *definitely* never thought he would be chomping at the proverbial bit to get to a fifteen year high school reunion event.

Would the music be awful, the drinks watered down, the outfits trashy and the ambience appalling? A foregone conclusion. But this was for Will, and Hannibal was having the time of his life, determined to make sure Will did, too.

He escorted a blushing, shy Will to the function room where the predictable disco balls glimmered over a scratched dance floor. Then, a carpet with such an ugly pattern that Hannibal was sure it might tangle the human mind beyond repair if one looked at it directly for too long.

On top of that were a series of weathered tables and plain chairs. The tables all bore shiny, plastic, blue tablecloths topped by a gold centerpiece sprouting with glitter stars and a sign declaring "Reunion Night!" Whoever had put this event together clearly didn't even splash out enough money for the name of the school or its (he did not doubt) hideous sports mascot to be printed on the decor.

A "dj" sat half asleep near the sparsely populated dance floor, where a series of thirty-somethings, some coupled and some just dancing with friends from their golden days, were moving around to a jarring '90's dance hit. Hannibal would not call the drunken contortions of their body "dancing," anymore than he'd refer to the racket they threw themselves around to as "music."

Will winced as the sound of "*Everybody! Backstreet's Back, alright!*" filled the air. "Sorry," he mouthed.

Hannibal was able to laugh at his own primly loathing response to the whole scene. "I don't want to hear one more apology," he purred into Will's ear. "*My darling*."

Will's hand was hot and a bit sticky with sweat in Hannibal's own. Despite this, and the excited, nervous anticipation which Hannibal could read on him – Will's trembling and the brightness of his ocean blue eyes, shining with unshed tears of fear and anxiety – the boy's demeanor shifted.

Having apparently decided to throw himself into the experimental project, since there was now no turning back, Will batted his long, dark lashes, looked Hannibal right in the eyes, and then bent to press a warm kiss to the older man's hand.

Hannibal's heart thundered; Will was altogether too handsome and suave, and every single person in the room had stopped what they were doing to look at him.

An almost cartoonish burst of whispered gossip and louder drunken questions or guesses followed. A few of Will's former peers were heard to remark "Can't be that meek lil' nerd Graham, no way!" or "I'm tellin' ya, it's him alright, 'n I can prove it." A bet soon followed, and Hannibal was sure many of the other conversations in the crowd were similar.

Mimicking Hannibal's own dignified mischief, Will gave him a trickster's irresistible smirk. "Shall we, then, my love?"

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Will was having an out-of-body experience. This was the only explanation for how he could be acting with such bold confidence and grace, so that he and Hannibal seemed to be floating on a cloud of superiority compared to everyone else. Some of his old classmates looked happy and healthy, but still more were either wan and worn or just clearly mean drunks.

As the dj spun plenty of loud, nostalgic songs from his youth, Will sat down with Hannibal at his assigned table ("*Wil Gram and Guest*"), unbuttoning his jacket as he'd seen the older man do so many times. He gave Hannibal a sly smile and winked, "I think I can pull this off after all. They're *gawking* at us."

Hannibal glanced around with mild interest. "I believe I can see the various teenaged archetypes of American cinema, albeit their adult incarnations, with relative ease. Athletes, basket cases, criminals, princesses…"

"Did you watch *The Breakfast Club* to prepare for this trip?" Will's eyes widened as Hannibal nodded proudly.

"Apparently it was an accurate enough prognosis of the teenaged dilemma. Do you disagree that these specimens are mutations of their former selves, personalities bloated and paled with age and experience?"

"You talk about them like they're not even people," Will said, his eyes flicking up and down the handsome, serene figure of his friend.

"Are they?" Hannibal's smile was unreadable, except that Will's empathy picked up a frightening thrum of sadistic malice.

Will was surprised to find that his own honesty flared in a proud response when Hannibal allowed this amoral coldness to show.

"I don't know," he answered with an arch look, brows raised, a teasing smile making him look soft and scary all at once.

“It hardly matters, anyway, as you’ve conquered the room upon entering it.”

“Fellas, welcome!” A woman of Will's age stopped by their table with a hand on her hip, a basket of flowers hanging from one arm. She had fluffy blonde hair, overly teased but shining, and cruel, jade green eyes.

“It’s me, Tamara Beth Tyler. I’m married ten years now, but I kept my own name.” She pointed a long, blue nail at her own name tag, then glanced at the stickers announcing Will and Hannibal’s names. They had filled them in with black sharpie soon after coming in.

“Hi Tammy Beth,” Will greeted icily. “You haven’t changed a bit.”

She had aged well, especially compared to a lot of the others in the room, many of them now bumping and grinding to “Genie in a Bottle.” Will thought they might actually hurt themselves pretty soon at that rate.

“Will Graham. Why, of course, I remember you.” She said this in the same tone with which she might recall having Chicken Pox.

“Yes, despite 'forgetting' how to spell my name on the seat assignments. Tammy Beth, Allow me to introduce you to my partner, Dr. Hannibal Lecter,” he added “graciously.”

He and Hannibal stood, following gentlemanly etiquette as Tammy quickly got over a frown when Will called her by her teen nickname.

She beamed at them again and shook their hands, setting her basket down as the disco light landed on the sequins of her tight magenta dress with an aggressive, nauseating swirl.

“I told *my Will* he hasn’t changed a bit either, except that he has only gotten handsomer with time,” Hannibal confided to Tammy Beth. “But he never wants to be complimented. Humble *and* heroic, didn’t I catch a good one?”

Will’s skin prickled all over as Hannibal’s hand landed on his hip with a possessive squeeze. He put his own fingers hesitantly on the older man’s shoulder, but while inside he was feverish with nerves, he kept his attitude calmly casual.

“Heroic, our little Will? Why, do tell, I can hardly imagine what you mean.”

Tammy Beth sat down for a few minutes, and Hannibal regaled her with an impressive, eloquent blurb of Will’s accomplishments that barely stretched the truth but left out all the embarrassing, bad parts. The popular girl who used to trip him in Science and mock him in the halls was barely able to hide her annoyance at Will’s success.

When Tammy Beth also had to listen to what Hannibal did for a living and to Will’s praise of his “boyfriend’s” shining career and how he cooked, played two exotic instruments and sketched beautifully, she seemed ready to grimace. Instead she gave them a frozen smile that looked like it hurt her cheeks.

“I guess you never can tell what someone’s gonna grow up to be when they’re a gangly lil’ runt with glasses, glowerin’ in the back of the room,” Tammy said, her voice cheerful as if

she was “just kidding.”

Hannibal replied in a honeyed voice, entirely breezy. “Actually, I think it is more than apparent. After all, I’ve seen Will’s yearbook photo. He has always been strikingly handsome and brilliant as well. So much more intelligent than his age. How he must have intimidated most of you who believed yourself so naturally superior. I’m sure that making fun of him was an easy way to restore your potentially dented pride, wasn’t it, Tammy Beth?”

The quiet in the room had to do with the dj’s break. A few alumni were headed for the stage to make “fun speeches.” As the pregnant pause gave Tamara plenty of time to get over her shock at Hannibal’s statements, she was ready to retort soon enough. A squeal of mic feedback sliced the tense air between them as Tammy glared, finding Hannibal completely unfazed.

“I’ve never bullied anyone in my life,” she snapped. “And he still has creepy eyes.”

“Hmm. I’m sure you say things like that about all the people too beautiful and smart to give you the time of day.” Hannibal moved on from this comment swiftly, nodding to the basket which she had now snatched again, ready to move on from the uncomfortable excuse for small talk. “Don’t we get some of those? Don’t be a poor host, Tammy Beth, what would the student council of 1998 say about that? You mustn't allow your presidential demeanor to weaken in the face of inconvenient truths.”

“Exactly,” Will sighed in a condescending manner.

Tammy scowled, heaved a frustrated breath that made her sequins jiggle audibly, and then smacked two small bundles of flowers on the table. “Corsages. Knock yourselves out. Really, please do.”

She fled their presence, quickly forgotten as Hannibal picked up one of the corsages, which had a wristband. “May I?”

Hannibal had opted for a dashing, dark blue suit which complimented Will’s nicely. He wore a tie, unlike Will, but he had foregone any of the busier, more eccentric and often impressive pattern combinations of his usual attire. Will wondered if Hannibal had worn something more subtle to let his date shine.

Anyway, Hannibal still looked exquisite, his godly beauty displayed in an even more outrageous manner than usual. It was the setting, the copy of a copy of a copy of what someone sort of thought was a reunion that probably should happen. How could a man like that not stand out?

The cheap, ugly decorations and lethargic dj, the clash of cheesy laser lights in neon colors and the glitter of the disco ball. Hannibal’s imposing physique appeared to shocking advantage as he sat in the plain fold-out chair, nevertheless maintaining his usual perfect posture.

And now here he was, reaching for Will’s hand, because Hannibal was his *date*, and damn proud of it. No doubt about that, even if Will struggled to see the line between his own

desires and how Hannibal felt about him.

“Aww, fine,” he laughed, his genuinely humble side coming back as he accepted the corsage.

Funny, how Will could feel that his own arch, conniving and superior attitude towards Tammy and the other grown up bullies was totally real, too. Instead of bothering him or making him feel guilty, freakish, Will found it invigorating for once.

He was so many different people, he didn’t know how they all fit in one personality, but it never bothered Hannibal, who had the psychological knowledge to be keenly aware of it.

If Hannibal didn’t mind Will’s strangeness and the limitless possibilities it held, not all of them savory, why should Will?

The doctor slowly put the white elastic around Will’s wrist, sliding his thumb over Will’s pounding pulse as he made sure it wasn’t twisted. “While the *elastic band* leaves much to be desired, the flowers themselves are charming.”

Will looked down at his own wrist, one of the few parts of him not quivering and trying to hide it, dying from excitement in too many ways to count. The row of full, fragrant white roses and baby’s breath was pretty.

“Must be Deanna Jones’s contribution. She always wanted to work at her father’s flower shop when she grew up.”

As he nodded to Deanna across the room, he held up his corsage. One of the few kind souls of his graduating class, the curvy woman with a bun made up of tiny braids waved at him with a grin.

While many alums were chatting amongst themselves and filling their plates with morsels of dubious appearance from the “buffet,” this flurry of activity was obviously undertaken to ignore the awkward, tipsy babbling on the stage, courtesy of Will’s former number one bully, Joel-Lee Tucker.

The guy used to seem so monstrously terrifying to little skinny Will when he terrorized the boy at every chance. Now, he looked sort of sad, and Will distractedly thought he heard Joel-Lee trying to work in an advertisement for his used car business.

What had Will been so afraid of back then? Had it really been Tammy Beth and Joel-Lee, or himself? Was it growing up and having to deal with the world, knowing he was unfit for a decent life, knowing the work it would be to hide his darker urges?

Because now, Will was all grown up, but being with Hannibal made him feel like a kid at heart sometimes. His emotions were flooded, infatuation spilling out of his heart to pump delighted, hopeful desires through his blood. Hannibal smiled when Will gave him another teasing look from under his lashes, then pinned a corsage to his jacket.

“Thank you, my dear,” said Hannibal with an adorably pleased little nod.

He stood, every inch the Daddy-ish male model that had everyone in the place drooling and made Will's whole body cry out for more of him than might even be physically possible.

The music started up again.

And with a gallant bow, as if they were at a Victorian ball, Hannibal asked him to dance.

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There was *no* saying no to that enticing question, so Will found himself on the dance-floor, Hannibal's arms comfortably circling his waist, his own wrapped around Hannibal's neck.

They were doing the fucking *middle school side-to-side*, on purpose because it let them cling together. And knowing Hannibal was an excellent dancer from previous conversations, Will was now positive this wasn't such a "Fake" date, after all.

"This song," Will chuckled, "'Un-break my Heart.' It's so sad, but they always played it at the dances, everyone acting as if it wasn't. The pop hits of my generation were mostly….depressing, actually, now that I think about it."

The next song was "My Heart Will Go On," and Hannibal thought it seemed more cheerful until Will told him it was from the movie *Titanic.*

"Ah," Hannibal said with a warm laugh, not bothered at all by any song that might play next. He was holding Will as if they were going to dance forever, and nothing could make him happier.

As Will dared to nuzzle closer, his face close to Hannibal's neck and profile, the older man murmured in an intimate voice, "I won't let you touch any of that reprehensible 'food' at the 'buffet' over there. We can dance for a while, show off for the crowd, then I'll find you an establishment that deserves you."

"Are you tellin' me what I can and cannot eat, Dr. Lecter?" Will flirted, as drunk as if he'd been downing margaritas alongside Tammy Beth and her clique of faded hangers-on. But the floaty feeling was still all Hannibal. "Kinda bossy."

"Do you object?" Hannibal's hand smoothly massaged Will's back, making the younger man shiver, feeling like a well-petted, spoiled puppy.

"Not in the slightest. Guess I've never been good at hiding how much I like you takin' care of me and tonight…I don't feel like even tryin' to hide it."

"You're *drawling,*" Hannibal said, his voice throaty and close to Will's forehead. He was scenting Will, breathing him in. "It's beautiful. So are you."

Will's head was spinning. There it was, no more questioning it, Hannibal just said it. This night had nothing to do with platonic support from a rich and considerate friend who needed a new project.

“Were you waiting to be sure I felt the same before saying that to me?” Will shook his head, tears in his eyes as relief and exhilarating arousal made him feel so urgently alive, he was having trouble breathing, in the best way.

“Can you blame me?” Hannibal held him more tightly as the song changed to “I Believe in You and Me,” and Will felt like giving a tip to the dj for playing so many slow songs. “I’m not used to feeling this way. I wasn’t sure how well I would handle rejection if you felt otherwise.”

“That was never a possibility,” Will said. He looked up at Hannibal with stars in his eyes.

And Joel-Lee came staggering up with a beer in his hand and some of his same old cronies by his side. “Hey there, Killer,” said the salesman, with his terrible goatee and miserable eyes full of malevolent nostalgia. “I see you managed to scare and-or bribe some poor soul into comin’ here as your date!”

Joel-Lee and his friends cackled, and one of them – either Bo or Dick, Will could never tell the difference even back in the day (though they were *definitely* both dicks) – smacked the lead bully on the back in encouragement.

“Yeah. What’s up, creepy? You terrorizin’ your locals up north? You always *did* look like the sort to be mutilatin’ animals and –”

“How ironic of you,” Hannibal remarked coldly. He glanced at the drunken man’s name tag and added, “Bo. Will owns seven dogs and is the one person I know who is so kind to animals, it nearly defies belief. But then, Will, my *lover*, is not only kind, but deeply sweet and loving. I’m sure you don’t really think he’d have to threaten or pay me, when being his date is the most wonderful thing that has ever happened to me.”

With that, Hannibal took Will’s face in both of his hands and laid a soft, searching kiss on his mouth. The touch of Hannibal’s warm lips was a question, soon answered as Will’s hands drifted up to touch his elbows and surprised happiness made him kiss Hannibal in return, as if the kisses were oxygen itself.

Along with his slow, deep kiss, Will felt Hannibal’s hands wrap around his neck, not pressing, just feeling him with gentle caresses and harmless squeezes. Nevertheless, it was so suggestive that Will moaned into his mouth.

“You have a thing about my neck?” he asked, voice breaking as he stopped to breathe, his forehead resting against Hannibal’s.

Hannibal grinned, staring at the mess he’d already made of Will: tousled the neat new hair, reddened his plump lips with kisses. “*Yes*.”

Irresistibly, Hannibal felt compelled to surge forward, licking at Will’s lips. Will grabbed his back in a ferocious grip and pressed himself against Hannibal as their mouths crashed, tongues sliding together. Hannibal sucked on his tongue, and Will’s knees went weak; he bit down on his date’s lower lip, and Hannibal *growled*.

From somewhere in the *very* far, unknown distance, they were vaguely aware of "hooting and hollering" from the friendlier classmates and an assortment of sour remarks from the mean ones. "Don't have to go home but you can't stay here!" someone – probably Joel-Lee – crowed.

And then a woman – Tammy Beth – loudly complained, blah blah blah, something about "should be ashamed, *Mike and I* would never make a spectacle of ourselves like that. For Chrissake, *K-Ci and JoJo* are playing! This is a disgrace to the name of *Save the Last Dance*!

"You know what?" Will broke off the kiss with Hannibal, mainly because they were on the verge of real public indecency; the elegant Dr. Lecter was panting a bit, lips as wet and swollen as Will's own.

That wasn't a sight Will would soon forget.

He stalked over to Tammy Beth indignantly. "That was uncalled for, *Tamara*. If anyone here is an insult to the mere mention of late nineties Julia Stiles, it is *you*."

Assorted classmates let out hushed, but enthusiastic "oooooohhh's" as if this was a rerun of a particularly feisty *Ricki Lake* episode.

A man wearing glasses and a tie indicating he pretty much *had* to be a teacher, a gym teacher, judging by the basketball pattern, came to stand beside Tammy Beth protectively.

"Mike, he's been just awful to me all night," Tammy Beth sniffled.

"You need to step off, *Will Graham*," said Mike, who must be Mr. Tammy Beth.

Will could sense Hannibal waiting behind him, trusting Will to handle this confrontation alone. He appreciated the vote of confidence, but also knew damn well that Hannibal was barely holding back a large amount of laughter.

"Really?" Will looked at Tammy Beth in bewilderment. He'd finally recognized her husband. "*Mike McGee*, cricket bat Mike McGee from that one school campin' trip in '97? You *married* him?"

"That cricket bat thing was just a vile rumor," Mike defended himself, but it wasn't very convincing.

"*Riiigghhght.*" Will nodded. "Well, y'all have fun with…that. I'm going to take my handsome, wealthy, doctor boyfriend and go have some real fun."

"Whatever. Never mind *Save the Last Dance*, you don't even deserve to watch *Can't Hardly Wait*, which we are screenin' tomorrow night in the field behind the school. You're uninvited," Tammy Beth told Will.

"*Hey.*" Will pointed at her in severe warning, his eyes narrowed. She'd gone too far now. "You keep *Can't Hardly Wait* out of your mouth."

With that, he turned and walked off like the obviously bad motherfucker he (apparently) was.

“Don’t bother showin’ your face again at the 25th anniversary reunion!” Cried out one of Tammy Beth’s friends.

“Wasn’t plannin’ on it,” Will smirked, “I think I’m officially done here. Darlin’?”

The resplendent, proud smile on Hannibal’s face was everything. Will presented his date (his *boyfriend!* Almost his lover, heavily implied–) with his arm, and linking together, they made a rather smug exit.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: Hannibal takes bold steps to resolve a (human) problem from Will’s teen years in his own inimitable fashion. Can Will accept the Ripper hiding under Hannibal’s person suit? Is the bed at the B&B going to survive a two night stay if the answer is yes? This and more!

truly, madly, deeply

Chapter Notes

cw: brief reference to drug use by local bully

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"*You're under my skin*
'Bout to get in and I'm feeling so much
Been having visions
Colorless mess when I'm out of your touch
You take it away
After one taste and nothing hurts
Long, broken highways
In a dark daze, I've become a desert
I want you around me
Your ocean surrounding
Your potion to drown me" -Ellie Goulding

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Will's hand swung in Hannibal's playful grip between them as he laughed, his heart feeling light enough to float him to another, higher dimension. Somewhere darker and sweeter than heaven, somewhere only Hannibal could take him. And he was more than ready.

Except, as they walked into the hotel lobby right outside the event room where '90's music and drunken revelry still reverberated through the walls, Will realized how hot his face felt, and that the sweaty, nervously excited sensation had him uncomfortably, overly warm.

"Where to, my dear?" Hannibal asked as they paused by the front desk.

He brought Will's knuckles to his lips and brushed his lips across them. A lady working at the check-in desk sighed as if watching Pride and Prejudice in real life.

"I want you to take me back to the bed and breakfast," Will smiled shyly, "Mostly for the bed part?"

"Nothing could make me happier." The sinful mischief in Hannibal's gaze went right to Will's groin, bringing a delightful, dizzy bliss.

"Me, too." Will set his hands on the front of Hannibal's shirt, lovingly playing with the collar, then running his hands down the older man's chest. "First, I just need to give my face a cold splash of water."

“No headache, I hope?” Hannibal asked, concerned.

He always remembered Will’s usual difficulties and quirks. Working such a stressful job and carrying that weight of guilt, confused empathy and near-daily shock did tend to leave Will with regular headaches. Or it used to. Now Will was pretty sure the days of mind-numbing headaches might be behind him.

He knew it was not only ridiculous, but obnoxiously romantic to imagine that he could be healed by Hannibal, as if the older man had magic to take all of his problems away. But was it that crazy? After all, there was no denying the cause of his ailments to be stress, and that being with Hannibal was like getting tossed a giant stress eraser.

And his imagination had taken a break from trying to constantly remind him of his own horrible, evil “true self” who could never be forgiven for his instincts. Because now, when he sought answers from his mind, he was getting…”giant stress eraser.” He couldn’t help but laugh.

“No, I feel fine, albeit as if you’ve set me on fire,” Will smiled flirtatiously. “Just gimme a minute?”

“Of course. Hurry back.” He gave Will’s ass a quick, light slap and Will choked out a more panicked, aroused laugh.

“*Hannibal.* Jeez, I’m tryin’ to cool off here.”

“However temporarily.” Hannibal smirked as Will giggled, shook his head and went in the direction of the men’s room.

He had intended to merely linger about the lobby, as Will wouldn’t be long. But then he noticed Joel-Lee crossing the large room. The past and present bully went into a coat room alone, wearing a sneaky expression.

Peculiar. In Louisiana’s heat, there was probably only a rare need for a coat room to even exist. Certainly, no one here tonight would have worn outerwear in the 85 degree mugginess which was just as thick and near-suffocating as Will had warned.

Peculiar, but convenient.

Hannibal intended to give Joel-Lee a piece of his mind for that cruelty towards Will. He knew that a) he’d promised himself not to kill while on this trip, and b) this was ill-advised, as impulsive kills were a problem. Not only because he wouldn’t be able to take any trophies for a victor’s feast to follow. The real issue was the higher risk of being apprehended. But no one was going to bully Will, whether back then or on this very night, and get away with it. Before coming here, he had mistaken his own tolerance for witnessing the rude and despicable conduct in person. As it turned out, he had no tolerance for it at all. *Ah, well.*

Some risks are well worth taking.

Proposing this trip and coming here with Will had taught him that, had it not? Living off his instincts with such wonderful results had conjured a primal excitement roaring inside him, making the tempting call to the hunt even more irresistible. Hannibal had already noted on many occasions that his viciousness in killing always rose when he felt more than usually alive in any way – it had been survivor's guilt, trauma, rage and many other emotions over the years. This was the first time he had ever felt this way due to *happiness*. Fascinating and irresistible.

He entered the coat room, which had been left unlocked by the inebriated buffoon within, and discovered Joel-Lee's wiry, balding figure, with his rumpled suit and eau de cheap whiskey, hunched over the small check-in desk, inhaling a thin line of cocaine. His hands, oddly stubby for his thin figure, were an unhealthy graying pale peach, as if his skin was fruit left out too long in the sickly summer heat. They shook with the tremors of regular drug use and the satisfying high one found when previously strung out and in need of a hit.

All in all, this cretin was just the sort of sad sack for whom one could summon no sympathy. His troubles were obvious enough; his complete void of kindness, concern or manners cut the metaphorical car brakes of Hannibal's potential mercy before the motor could even start.

"Did I miss something?" Hannibal asked, almost politely, as he closed the door behind them. He turned the lock as well and looked at the imbecile who had hurt Will, his own handsome features falling into a self-satisfied, cold smirk. "The sign says Coat Room, but…Is this the illegal drug room? Color me shocked, Joel-Lee. So glad you found and availed yourself of such a useful facility. I hope you won't mind too much if I do the same."

"It's the *get the fuck outta here* room's what it is, asshole," Joel-Lee blathered, following this with a long sniff. He leaned back against the coat-check counter, his arms spread and skinny wrists dangling, showing off the disproportion of ill health entirely brought on himself through lifestyle and careless self-destruction.

Hannibal thought he may as well say as much, merely to emphasize the symbolic neatness of his impending murder of this fool. He did enjoy a bit of a chat prior to ending a victim. It was one of the more entertaining aspects of the whole ritual.

"I couldn't agree more. I also noticed that you've taken up some nasty habits, following them faithfully over the decade and a half since my partner was unlucky enough to be your daily punching bag. Was it harder to hold back your urge to hasten along your own downfall and early demise, once you no longer had Will to shove around? I'm sure he made an especially useful target, given that he is superior to you in every way, yet he was bashful and naive enough to let you harass him."

"You really think I give a flyin' *fuck?* I do what I want, Uncle Rando, then an' now. *Will Graham?* What a fuckin' *loser*. Ain't nothin' wrong with a little partyin' at a high school reunion; who comes to these things and doesn't get wasted? Take your goddamn judgment and your dumb-ass comments elsewhere, Pops. I got enough fuckin' problems."

His eyes were squinting, black and hyper; his face contorted in hateful amusement at his own perceived victory.

“I see you consider yourself the underdog. Will was always in your way, wasn’t he?”

“That little creep, right you are, jackass. Someone hadda put that eerie runt in his place, it’s prolly down to me he didn’t kill every animal and classmate in town. *Psycho.”*

How utterly tasteless and disgustingly rude. Hannibal was not merely avenging his sweetheart; killing this vile excuse for a man would instantly beautify the world and save countless others the annoyance of ever interacting with him.

“I thought so. Perhaps you recall my earlier remark about using the ‘Get the Fuck Out’ room. I’m sorry, but you don’t have any claim on this facility, and furthermore, since you are so determined to run yourself into an early grave with abominable, sadistic antics and cheap cocaine, I would be remiss not to do you the favor of assisting.”

Hannibal gave his victim a cat-like smile with deadly eyes, right before he lunged smoothly forward, gloved hand swooping up with a sharp blade. It had been easy to slip on the gloves he always carried just in case he needed to suddenly attack, since the man was far too “wasted” to make note of details. It had been a good idea to also bring his small, but highly effective dagger, since his “always be prepared” motto had once again proved correct.

He was used to being right, of course, but that didn’t mean it stopped being quite satisfying.

Joel-Lee never even realized the danger before Hannibal buried the knife buried in his gut with a lethal, brutal twist. A sick, punching stab noise and a nauseating rip of human flesh were the only necessary sounds in the deed. Luckily, the loud music and the element of surprise meant there was no screaming, and overall it was a quiet and slick enterprise for one undertaken spur of the moment.

There were ways to stab someone in this area without it being a fatal wound, but Hannibal made sure this was the end of Joel-Lee. It was ruthlessly efficient, in the sense that it was quick, but provided the maximum, excruciating demise to Will’s bully.

Belatedly, the bully realized why he was in agony as he bled out all over the cheap hotel carpet, with Hannibal carrying out his work while smoothly dodging contact between his clothing and the thick dripping waterfall of blood from the deadly slash. Rather than Joel-Lee’s muffled cries of horror and pain, Hannibal could hear another emotional ballad playing from the function room.

“*How do I live without you? I want to know. How do I breathe without you, if you ever go…*”

Will had been right. The hit songs of the late nineties possessed an intriguing overgrowth of maudlin and melodramatic romantic pleas. In the moment, the lyrics were a suiting and twistedly funny background serenade to Hannibal’s latest kill.

His blue medical glove was clamped over Joel-Lee’s mouth to cover the late attempts to cry out for help or beg for his life; the idiot’s lips had already gone sagging and slack within seconds of slumping onto the floor. His eyes widened for a last time, rather amusingly giving him the look of a man who had stuck his finger in a socket. And really, that was an appropriate symbolic image for what Joel-Lee had done.

Careful to avoid the path of blood, he released Joel-Lee's face, ready to make a swift exit, to pocket the gloves and dispose of them at a convenient and sly interval later. It was too soon to share this part of himself with Will. But he knew Will would hear about Joel-Lee, at least by the next day. Would he suspect who had been behind this necessary social service and pruning of the graduating class to contain one less despicable weed?

"*How would I ever, ever survive?*" The young, female singer continued her lament as Hannibal casually got to his feet, congratulating himself on a job well done.

"What are you doing?" An astonished voice, the most familiar voice in the world to Hannibal, suddenly whispered from behind him.

Hannibal turned and saw Will standing there, still holding the doorknob. Apparently, the lock didn't work properly, because Will had opened the door without even making a sound.

"*Without you*
There'd be no sun in my sky
There would be no love in my life
There'd be no world left for me…"

Will's mouth hung open in shock, but his expression was otherwise impossible to interpret. He closed the door again and leaned against it.

There was nothing Hannibal could do to pretend he had not just stabbed the bully to death, without remorse. The knife was in his hand, blood slick on his gloves. He tugged them off matter-of-factly, although his heart pounded. As he tucked the gloves into a small ziplock bag and then into the inside pocket of his suit jacket, he considered possible explanations, only to find there was no real consideration needed. He knew what he must do, even as the thought of Will's rejection scared him far more than possible incarceration or even ending up on death row for his crimes.

"This is where it would be easy enough to tell you Joel-Lee attacked me," Hannibal explained, "But I don't want to play those games anymore. I want you to see me for who and what I am. You've been with the two sides of me so often lately, growing attached, becoming part of both, yet not able to recognize the –"

"You're the Ripper," Will said, still in a fierce whisper. He looked as if the wind had been knocked out of him. "This whole time, I…"

He put a hand to his forehead, struggling to comprehend. "I wasn't that blind. I had this feeling about you all along, just…told myself I didn't want to see you that way. I kept the suspicion always just out of view, beyond the periphery, but always there."

"*And I, baby, I don't know what I would do*
I'd be lost if I lost you
If you ever leave
Baby you would take away everything
Real in my life
And tell me now…"

“What do you mean, you told yourself you didn’t want to see me that way?” Hannibal’s own surprise was etched across his face. “What would you have felt if you allowed the suspicion of me as the Ripper to permeate your thinking?”

“*Rapture,*” Will admitted.

His voice was softly savage, his eyes electric blue and searing into Hannibal’s own fascinated gaze. With a few steps, they came together, immediately clinging to one another. “Delight. Fear. Anguish too sweet not to feast upon and live within, die for. Whatever you prefer. A desire for surrender, and to be one with you. The monster of my dreams.”

“I was hoping so desperately you’d still want me,” Hannibal sighed, cupping Will’s face and kissing him deeply.

“I want you even more,” Will said against his lips, then urgently pressed his warm, eager mouth to Hannibal’s. “So much. I love you. Need to be yours.”

Hannibal knew they must not linger in this room, and actually, they ought to go and establish themselves as being elsewhere when the crime occurred, post haste. Going back to pretend they’d left something behind ought to do the trick, as they would instantly be noticed, gossiped about, admired, and/or insulted. Everyone would remember that the now gorgeous and confident Will Graham and his fancy, big city doctor boyfriend had been in the room when poor, pitiful Joel-Lee was gutted like a fish.

“*How do I, how do I, oh how do I live?*”

Their lips slowly parted, fingers digging into one another’s clothing, claws of their inner demons sinking deeper into the hidden depths of their dark sides. They were locked together now, in a mutual understanding more profound than a wedding vow. Yet someday, Hannibal wanted to put his ring on Will’s lovely hand forevermore.

“That was such a movie kiss,” Will said hoarsely, his voice wan with the passionate way they had devoured each other’s lips, tangling their tongues, not daring to press their lower bodies together. They knew they’d never be able to hold back if they took it there, and this was no place.

“I just didn’t realize the movie of my life was a horror movie,” Will admitted.

“Do you mind?” Hannibal clasped his beautiful face, tracing his jaw, then his lips until Will kissed his fingers.

Will’s eyes were large and glazed in tears of shocked ecstasy. “*No!*” he whispered in amazement. “It’s all so clear to me now. Please get me out of here, let’s go back to our… *rooms*.”

“Hmm. We will make good use of the extra space,” Hannibal said wickedly. “And we may need an extra bed if we irreparably damage the first.”

“You are incorrigible,” Will encouraged, his eyes sparkling with merriment. Not a trace of fear, anger or judgment. “Come with me. We got one last appearance to put in, and they’re playin’ ‘Kiss from a Rose.’ Shouldn’t miss the chance to dance to that.”

Hannibal grinned. They slipped out of the disused room, leaving it silent and abandoned, as no one would likely enter it until the cleaning staff arrived in the morning.

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“Speaking of incorrigible,” Will accused fondly when they arrived back on the second floor of the B&B. With two rooms to choose from, Hannibal decided to begin with Will’s own. He unlocked it and gestured in his usual gentlemanly way for Will to go in first.

“Taking care of my high school bully like that?” Will said in a low tone. “What were you thinking, Dr. Lecter? How very shocking and scandalous.”

“That is the least of the scandals I’ve regaled you with this evening.” Hannibal raised his eyebrows as he followed Will in, the epitome of a handsome devil in his suit, which was not even sullied or wrinkled in the fight.

“I’ll say.” Will sat on the bed with a teasing smile. He slipped off his suit jacket and folded it neatly beside him. “For example, you confessed to being madly in love with me. Imagine that. Me, your former patient. Your colleague! And your friend. You seem bound and determined to ruin the friendship, Doctor.”

“I must add that to the pile of confessions,” Hannibal admitted. His smirk returned Will’s flirtatious lash flutter in kind.

“Doctor…did you bring me here to romance me, or seduce me?”

“Do I really have to choose?” Hannibal climbed onto the bed and pinned Will beneath him, savoring his lover’s lip-biting moans.

“No, you don’t,” Will answered, blushing. “Hannibal, I’ve thought about being with you so many times. I never thought this would happen.”

“When you thought about it,” Hannibal murmured huskily, breathing on Will’s lips, teasing, “Did you imagine this?”

He pressed his mouth to Will’s rather sweetly, then pulled back with a smile.

“Yes,” Will laughed gently. “And this.”

He pulled Hannibal to him by the older man’s tie and kissed him more urgently, causing his lover to growl between kisses, “Did you imagine this, Will?”

Then he flicked his tongue hungrily against Will’s before sucking it. Will returned everything he was given, his arms wrapped tightly around Hannibal, feeling his broad, heavier body on top of him. He could also feel the huge erection that kept brushing against his own and started to seriously resent their clothes, no matter how good they had looked at the reunion.

“I thought about that a lot,” Will admitted, “And I thought about your teeth in my skin…”

The mere fact that Will would invite Hannibal to bite him, offering an open invitation, spoke volumes about trust. “I’m a beast, Will, and now you know it.”

Hannibal’s lips were hot and fierce, but soft and loving; his hair fell loosely over his chiseled, godly features, humanizing the intimidating level of handsomeness he possessed. Will did trust him, and he was happy to show it.

“*My* beast…my Ripper,” Will whispered, rolling his hips to push their clothed cocks together with several rhythmic thrusts.

“Will,” Hannibal gasped, soon groaning at his cock filling out even more, thickening and wetting his briefs with precum.

He began to kiss and bite at Will’s neck to his heart’s content, which was quite a lot…Will writhed and moaned in blissful pain as the Ripper repeatedly, greedily kissed and sucked a bruise on every inch of his long, pale neck.

Will could hear the older man cursing in wonderment, the sighed exclamations in several languages making Will shiver at the thought of him, just – *Will Graham,* having this effect, bringing the hidden passion out of this sophisticated, cool and calm man.

Hannibal smiled at his work and sat up as Will stared at him, gawking, actually. “I realize I’m completely objectifying you with my eyes right now,” he admitted playfully.

With Hannibal straddling Will, their cocks were still nudged together, sending tantalizing thrills of anticipatory pleasure through both men. Hannibal shot Will a wickedly coy look.

“I’m your lover, Will. You have every right to stare, touch and taste as much as you like. I do hope you intend to take full advantage of your rights over me.”

With that, he quickly undid his tie and unbuttoned his shirt, slipping it off to find that Will’s shaky hands were already working his belt open. Despite his nervous excitement, Will’s sheer determination, doubled or – hell, maybe tripled and then some by the sight of a shirtless Hannibal – won out.

“There we go,” Will grinned, totally overwhelmed and never happier. “Let me just help you with those, Doctor…”

Hannibal’s breath caught as Will’s long fingers capably released him from his trousers, whereupon he stepped down and kicked them off like a man on a mission.

Will gazed at him with a smirk when Hannibal came back to bed. “Hey, what about our expensive, fancy, debonair new suits? I can’t believe you just tossed that away to land wherever, even maybe to get wrinkled?”

“Normally, my dear, sartorial concerns would rank nearly at the top of my most urgent concerns in life. But exceptions can be made, especially for the person who is in the number

one position." As Hannibal spoke, he hurriedly undid Will's tie and shirt buttons, groaning when the younger man slowly pulled his lover's silk briefs down.

Will gasped at Hannibal's massive dick, sticky precum beading the head, and then he swallowed hard. He already wanted that cock so far into his mouth and…God, his *body*. Hannibal *inside* him…it was everything Will needed. Will sat up and whipped his tie and shirt off in a lustful frenzy he could barely contain.

With fire in his amber eyes, Hannibal made even faster work of Will's remaining clothes, peeling off the trousers, boxers and socks all in one go, which was impressive. But Will was more concerned with their sudden mutual nakedness, with Hannibal's body, warm and scented with his delicious cologne and the essence of his desire, once again pressed on top of him.

"Will Graham," Hannibal said in a deep, sinful tone that made Will tremble all over. "The things I'm going to do to you…"

Will's eyes rolled back and he bit his lip hard, running his fingers over Hannibal's strong, tensed biceps, his beautiful, smooth back, his broad shoulders. He wanted to touch Hannibal everywhere, and never to stop exploring this sensuous, dangerous, intense man, this monster of his.

"I take that, um, as an indication that you like what you see?" Will meant to be teasing, but blushed as his coquetry ended with a high-pitched moan. Hannibal had instantly bit his neck again, on top of a pre-existing bite mark. Sweet pain surged through Will, and their bodies were locked together, groping, caressing, deeply kissing, grinding their hot, dripping cocks together so slowly. Taking their time.

"Was that a good answer, darling?" Hannibal asked at least ten minutes later when they were still making out, with long, wet, sucking, biting kisses, rolling around on the bed feeling each other's naked bodies, the feeling of the two of them skin to skin at last.

"Huh?" Dizzy with pleasure and the delightful pain of taking it gradually to prolong the all-night sex he knew they were going to have, Will blinked down at Hannibal, having landed on top with the latest, careless roll over on the bed.

"Hmm." Hannibal winked at him, squeezed his ass, then slapped it, making Will yelp in surprise. "You asked if I like what I see. You, without a stitch of clothing to keep this hot, tight, perfect little body away from me, and hours stretching before us to do nothing more than consume you? My dear, I hope my feelings are clear."

Will panted as Hannibal kneaded and massaged his soft ass cheeks like a man possessed. "God," he sighed, "You speak so formally for someone who's grabbing my ass. Don't expect me to remain that cogent…"

"Don't overestimate me, Will. Only a little more of this will have me equally incapable of logical thought."

"*You?*" Will raised his eyebrows. His mischievous flirting was interrupted, since Hannibal kissed him again, and *again,* obsessively thrusting his tongue as deeply as he could, exploring Will's mouth as his big hands continued groping lower down.

Will cupped Hannibal's face in both hands to help the older man kiss him more deeply, and Hannibal whispered, "Logical thought is overrated."

At the same time, he slid his hand worshipfully down the smooth dip in Will's low back, once again putting his hands where he'd clearly been dreaming of putting them for months. Hannibal reached between them, still kissing, and gathered some of the precum dripping in excess from his enormous hard-on. Will shivered and cried out when Hannibal began pressing a finger inside him while kissing the younger man, moaning when he nudged his lubricated finger in carefully, feeling Will's tightness.

"*Yeah*," Will said, *kind* of in answer to the thing about whatever "logic" was, but mostly to express "*Yeah, put another finger in, don't stop.*"

"Already taking me so well." Proud of Will, Hannibal rolled his lover over and immediately curled beside him so that Will's raging erection was close to his lips, while his own cock was achingly near Will's.

Delirious with Hannibal's confident manner of initiating sixty-nine, Will gave the older man's cock a kitten lick, reveling in Hannibal's sharp gasps as he began teasing the head of Will's own manhood with his clever, wicked tongue.

"There's something so fucking sexy about your confidence, how you put me wherever you want me," Will murmured, working the older man slickly in his eager grip.

Hannibal moaned, licking more sloppily at Will, showing that he was almost unbelievably good at giving head. Will pushed aside jealous thoughts of previous lovers and simply thanked God for everything that made Hannibal, *Hannibal.*

Like the hungry, dangerous, deadly cannibal's lips wrapped around Will's cock and sucking him deep, lapping and stroking with his hand – which felt enormous as usual, but in an especially hot way there –

"*Oh,*" Will sighed as he fell deeper and deeper into the world of pleasure where Hannibal took him. "My."

He lapped and sucked as Hannibal did the same to him, and the fact of this all happening at once – tasting his lover for the first time and getting the blow job of a lifetime – "*God!* God, fucking – Hannibal I'm close. Jesus *Christ*…"

The taste of Hannibal, the weight of this big, hard cock that was finally all Will's might have been enough to push him over the edge, but considering the sound of their hands both slickly stroking one another, the light, lip smacking, savoring moans and curls of tongues against, over, inside each other – all of it seemed to blur into a paradisiacal, excessive bliss. Will was way, way past his limits, which were already easily defeated by Hannibal.

“Come for me, that’s it, Will,” Hannibal encouraged him, the throaty rasp of his voice matching the heat in his stare when he looked up at Will’s face. “I want to taste it.” He turned back to Will’s throbbing cock and swallowed it down, every inch of Will’s own impressive length shoved roughly into Hannibal’s throat, because it was what Hannibal wanted to give Will, what the older man needed to feel and take for himself.

Will’s hips jolted. The profiler’s hand quickened on Hannibal, still jerking him with the slick of precum as the older man let him fuck his mouth, letting out delighted moans, but no choking noises, even as Will plunged deeper still.

He came with a hard thrust, shaking all over as Hannibal sucked and licked him through the shocking orgasm, white heat pouring through all that Will was. “Good boy,” Hannibal praised silkily, though his voice was a bit wrecked from deep throating. “That’s my boy, so sensitive, coming for me when I tell you…”

Will lost the ability to speak somewhere in an exultant kaleidoscope of feelings and sensations. His emotions were crashing into Hannibal’s, and the passion between them was explosive.

Then Hannibal was licking at Will’s hole, lovingly holding Will’s thighs apart.

“Mmm, perfect Will,” Hannibal sighed. He paused and glanced up at Will’s red, sweaty face, listening to the outpour of wild moans and his own name, enjoying how shaky Will was even a few minutes after coming.

“Would you mind holding these for me, darling?” Hannibal kissed each of Will’s ankles and calves, guiding Will to hold his legs back.

“Anytime,” Will choked out, keeping himself spread for Hannibal’s talented tongue to explore.

It was obvious that Hannibal liked eating Will out so much that he’d go on all night if they weren’t both feverish to be as close as two humans could be, at last. He still lapped, licked, and tongue-fucked Will’s tight pink hole for a good few long, luxuriating moments, groping Will’s cheeks and spanking them at the same time.

“There’s only one thing that would keep me from staying there until you come again,” Hannibal said with emphasis, and his face showed heart-melting adoration when Will giggled, embarrassed and yet thrilled by the pleasure Hannibal had given in such a raunchy manner.

“Please give it to me, I need all of you,” Will panted, wondering how he could feel so short of breath, yet glowing with vigor and life, never having felt stronger, braver, more true to himself. He was finally going to be complete, and could not wait another second.

Hannibal felt the same. He kissed Will’s neck with more of the raw passion he had been showing all night, lining himself up to the younger man’s hole, so slippery with precum that there was no need for lube. Will would really have to compliment Hannibal on that quality, which was both incredibly sexy and filthy-hot. But right then, he felt the immense, euphoric

pressure of Hannibal's thick, warm cock slowly entering him. Hannibal's progress came in careful, but knowing and firm glides, just a little deeper, and *deeper.*

Tears of overpowering pleasure dripped from Will's blue eyes as Hannibal held him closely and whispered to him, "I have you, darling, I'm going to take care of you always…I'm here, I'll fill you, take you like you've been needing."

"*Please-please-please–*" Hannibal kissed all over Will's face, jawline and neck, now beginning to thrust in earnest. Electric pleasure tingled through Will's whole body with each move Hannibal made. He had his eyes closed and his nails digging into Hannibal's back without even realizing it. And Hannibal plundered his mouth again with greedy fervor, fucking him harder.

"You feel so incredible, Will," Hannibal moaned in his ear before tugging it with his teeth and licking. "I've wanted you so long, so badly–"

"*Hannibal!" Will cried as his lover found his prostate and shifted his angle slightly to target it better. "Oh my fucking –" His nails scratched roughly down Hannibal's back, leaving long marks, a couple of which Will knew broke the skin; he could feel the hot wet blood on his fingertips.*

Hannibal hissed at the pain and groaned, "That's perfect, Will, show me how you feel when I'm fucking you, splitting you open, making a place inside you that's just for me – show me–"

Will had been about to apologize, in a weak, confused, moaning way, for the scratching. Since Hannibal liked it, he did it again. He needed a release of some kind to take all that cock, hitting the sweet spot over and over. Something to bite down on or – something to sink his nails into.

"Hannibal, you're *killing* me," Will gasped, clutching at him, groaning in ecstasy as the older man grabbed his thigh in a bruising grip and pressed their bodies together, fucking so deep and hard he felt it in his stomach. "*Killing me…*"

"Mmm, that's right darling," Hannibal said hotly in his ear, his voice broken with his own pleasure and rising need. "I'll eat you alive, my boy. Want you to come again, come with me. Do you want me to…?"

"Don't pull out, give me everything," Will begged, on cloud nine as Hannibal's beautiful, hairy chest rubbed against his bare one, and his lover had taken him over completely, harsh, intense and powerful, like the pleasure they shared.

They came almost in unison, hugging close and moaning tearfully, shaking and shuddering against each other. Will felt the warm wetness of Hannibal's release spreading deep inside him where it belonged. It dripped out onto the sheets in its excess, and they kept clinging together and kissing desperately.

The considerable mess they'd made of each other was an afterthought at best – until they had to admit they were sticky and the sheets destroyed. "We can sneak the sheets down to the

laundry room tomorrow morning and wash them."

"Naughty boy." Hannibal was gathering towels to bring into the bathroom so they could share a shower. He playfully snapped one at Will, who smirked and tossed it back.

"You're blaming *me?*" Will chuckled.

Hannibal turned the shower on and adjusted the temperature to just right, and then he leveled Will with A Look.

"I blame you entirely," he smiled.

***

It ended up being quite convenient that they had an extra bed in the room which had been "Hannibal's." Will couldn't help snickering as they climbed under the covers together, sleepy and cuddling.

"You really reserved two separate rooms knowing damn well you were going to seduce me."

"I was being polite, darling, how could I be sure you wished to be seduced? I may be something of a threat to the world at large and a remorseless monster in my own way. But I'm always careful with you."

He stroked Will's curls as Will snuggled his face against Hannibal's chest, smiling at the soft and tickly chest hair, both sexy and soothing. The tender words made Will's heart squeeze, knowing Hannibal would kill and eat anyone else, and had relatively little respect for most people in general. But for Will, he was all in, and he truly would do anything to keep his boy happy, protected and thriving.

If making love had been everything Will needed, then the expressions of love which followed were more than everything. He had never been so entirely content.

***

The "extra bed" also became a victim of its occupants' relentless desire for one another, since Hannibal woke Will in the early hours of the next day with his head under the covers, noticing the younger man's "morning wood" with smiling approval.

By the time they were done, the bed was even worse for wear than its predecessor. Now that they knew each other's bodies and those sensitive places that drove the other wild, both lovers obsessively used every bit of sexual skill they had, targeted right there. And…there… *there,* too…

Until suddenly, Will's legs were over Hannibal's shoulders as he was folded in half and the older man fucked him with growling, skin-slapping, animalistic hunger. Neither of them could quite contain the rising volume of their moans, which meant they might be putting on too much of a "show" for a cozy countryside B&B. This was probably *not* a place that often played host to sex this wild and all-consuming, Will thought distantly, but then again, who knew?

He grinned helplessly as Hannibal pounded into him, bringing them both close to climax, smiling back at Will with dazed happiness. That was when he heard the headboard start slamming against the elegantly papered wall, and the bed-frame beneath them creaking ominously.

"Fuck," Will moaned, inappropriately turned on by the rollicking damage and havoc they wreaked, drunk on each other's bodies.

They were so good together it hurt. This sort of thing was probably going to be an issue anywhere they traveled together.

When they *had* to take a break, or Hannibal was "seriously gonna pull something," according to Will, the older man reluctantly stopped his serious intention of (really) getting them hard again for round three, when Will could not even *move.*

Trembling, he laughed softly at his lover's voracious cravings for his body, a laugh of joy such as he never expected to feel. A sound so warm and musical, it was amazing to realize he could make it, or smile these sunny smiles and hold someone he never wanted to let go.

"Well," Hannibal shrugged, kissing Will's sweaty brow as they nestled in post-coital bliss, "We may need to provide funds to repair or replace the bed, and I'm not sure we were quite so subtle as we might have been while sneakily washing last night's sheets…"

"If you hadn't been practically yanking me back upstairs for the *second* round of sex in the morning, maybe the washer lid would have closed more quietly, instead of with a resounding slam." Will nudged Hannibal's calf with his knee; Hannibal caught his knee and stroked it, treasuring every part of his beloved.

"*Really,* Will. Look at you. All mine at last. More confident and glowing each time I take you…can you really blame me?"

Will snorted a laugh at Hannibal's faux-angelic face. "Yeah, I can blame you completely."

After a blissful sigh, Hannibal reflected, "At least I have the financial security to take on the costs of the ruined beds we will leave in our wake whenever we check in anywhere for a relaxing stay."

"Relaxing," Will repeated, giggling. "As if. Oh, by the way, I had a thought about a last little bit of fun we could have before heading back home."

Hannibal didn't even answer in words; he literally just reached for Will's cock.

"Not that," Will said, almost hysterically laughing by now, part of his exuberance just plain happiness. "I mean, *hmm–-ahh,* just hold on for a minute, so I can explain…"

"Yes, my dear?" Hannibal asked, changing his touch to more of a gently suggestive one rather than starting to stroke, as he'd been about to.

Will shivered and still considered his lover unfairly merciless. "*Mmm.* Oh! I remember. The reunion committee are showing the movie *Can't Hardly Wait* after sundown; it's an outdoor

screening in the back of the school. I can show you my old stomping grounds, give you the grand tour, just don't expect it to be very impressive. And then we can make out through the whole movie. I think there will be candy and popcorn too, so, bonus."

"That sounds delightful, my dear," Hannibal noted, nuzzling his nose against Will's, then leaving a little peck on his lips. "But we've been disinvited from that event by the chairwoman of the reunion committee herself."

"Aww, that's right, Tammy Beth barred us from attending." Will pretended to find this a problem, then broke into another grin. "Which means we're crashing it."

"I love how your mind works. And it should also be enjoyable to stick around long enough that poor Joel-Lee's body may be discovered. That should be quite the entertaining set of reactions."

"I was thinking the same," Will mused, "And that…there's a lake sorta thing out behind the school, one of the few scenic locations in town. I mean, technically, it's a *swamp*, like any body of water around here, but it's a nicer one. Nobody will be down there when the movie's playin' but I just bet we could lure the great Tammy Beth to that very place quite easily."

"She does seem to rise to your every challenge, despite her own deficiency of wit and manners." Hannibal's devilish smile was a perfect companion to Will's own. "Mylimasis, I am charmed at how wonderfully you are coming into your element, bursting from your chrysalis like the stunning butterfly I have always known you to be. Are you suggesting that our precious Tammy Beth should lose her footing near the deeper areas of the swamp-lake?"

"There's a lot of trees around that would obscure such things, so it'd be plain awful if good ol' *Tamara* just happened to bump her head *really* hard on a rock. Absolutely treacherous down there, especially if someone's been drinking." Will clucked his tongue. "I sure hope she'll be okay, but there's no guarantee. She may fall into the water while unconscious, and then it might well be her tragic end."

"You scheme and imagine the scenes of our future crimes with a talent on par with my own," Hannibal said proudly.

"Hannibal! You said I'm as good as *you?* How can that be possible?" Will laughed as his teasing brought him a sound series of "reproving" kisses, followed by Hannibal's hand returning to his cock with the usual enthusiasm.

They were going to have an *amazing* time before skipping that one horse town for good. And then Hannibal would take them home…*their* home. All they'd need for the family to be complete was Will's pack of adored dogs, but he could easily move them from his own smaller house to Hannibal's gothic wonder of a place.

Thoughts of Hannibal attempting to manage seven dogs in his pristine, snobby space made Will laugh into the next kiss, but his laugh cut off and changed into a moan soon after. He never had to worry about *anything,* not ever again. The terrifying Chesapeake Ripper was his lover, and Hannibal Lecter was devoted to giving Will what he wanted.

“There’s nothing I want more than you, Hannibal,” Will sighed, and as the older man gazed at him, besotted, Will’s heart skipped a beat.

Their limitless future was waiting in front of them with a uniquely blissful, wicked path. But first, they had really better end the morning by making sure this bed was well and truly ruined…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! 🎓🥳🫐🔪😍🔥💞

End Notes

Thanks for reading! 🎓🏫🎈🎉🎶💗

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